THE MODERN ASSYRIANS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

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THE MODERN ASSYRIANS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Encounters with Western Christian missions, archaeologists, and colonial powers

BY

JOHN JOSEPH

BRILL
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2000

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PREFACE

This is a revision of my *The Nestorians and Their Muslim Neighbors, a study of Western influence on their relations*, originally published by Princeton University Press in 1961. There were a number of reasons why I undertook the task at this time: there seemed to be an interest in the book which had been out-of-print for almost thirty years; a great deal had transpired during the rapidly-moving events of the post-World War II period; our knowledge on the various aspects of this history had greatly expanded; my retirement from teaching gave me the needed time; and finally, Brill's "Studies in Christian Mission" series afforded the possibility to publish when its General Editor, Dr. Marc R. Spindler, responded favorably to my proposal that the projected revision be evaluated for inclusion in the series. I was delighted when my work was accepted for that honor two months ago.

I am grateful to Dr. Spindler for accepting also a revised title for the book. The reasons for choosing the name Nestorians in the past are given in the original preface, reproduced below. The more controversial name "Modern Assyrians" is now used because of its greater unambiguity. To my surprise, there were a number of people, among them specialists on modern Middle Eastern history,[1] who, while familiar with the "Nestorians" and with the modern "Assyrians," were still unaware that "Nestorians" of my original title referred to the very same people who since the turn of the century came to be commonly called "Assyrians" in English.

This history is intended for the well-informed laymen but, hopefully, Middle Eastern scholars, in various disciplines, will also find it useful on areas and periods that are beyond their range of specialization. The monograph is written partly also with the modern Assyrian readers in mind, specifically those among them who through the years have expressed interest in obtaining a copy of the original. More than ever before, members of the new Assyrian generation realize that they have to be knowledgeable about the past as well as the present, and that a partisan history of their people, in the

[1] See below, p. 196n.72.

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words of one Assyrian author, "is paid little respect and eventually [is] undermined by trained historians." In the opening chapter I have tried to provide a more focused perspective of this history, examining some of the basic precepts that a few important Assyrian writers have advocated.

To the thanks and expressions of gratitude that I made in the original preface, I would like to repeat a few of my new debts: to a new generation of scholars without whose research and publications, cited in the bibliography and footnotes, this revision could not have been completed, and to a new generation of librarians, especially the interlibrary loan staff of Franklin and Marshall College, who, their reach now digital and global, made my source material all readily available. I would still be handling the "glitches" on the Macintosh if it were not for the efficient and cheerful help of Arlene Mimm, who after preparing countless revisions, patiently prepared the final one. My special thanks go to the only person who is noted in the original preface (thank heaven), my wife Betty, for her patience, understanding, and unfailing support.

John Joseph
Louis Audenreid Professor of History, Emeritus
Franklin and Marshall College
Lancaster, Pennsylvania
November 23, 1999

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FOREWORD

(First Edition)

In this atomic and space age, when fleets of jets have brought peoples and cultures within hours, rather than weeks and months, of each other, the history of our intercultural relationships, particularly those of formative periods, acquires paramount importance. To understand each other today we must know the truth about ourselves—about our respective cultures—yesterday and the days before. In the give and take of the generations, adjustments are often so painfully come by that myths and misconceptions, illusions, and disillusions, psychic sores and scars, become the heritage that complicates the cultural cooperation of the present, with the latter's tyranny of haste. To analyze this heritage, to sift the true from the false, and to set these forth in perspective and with clarity, is a much needed service.

This Dr. Joseph has done in connection with one limited, but important, area of relationships in the modern Near East. Throughout the centuries one of civilization's persistent problems has been the status and rights of minorities—especially of a communal and religious character. In both Christendom and the world of Islam, this problem persists, in the relationships of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, with varying degrees of success and failure. The problem is always compounded when the factors of domestic and international power politics are involved, as inevitably they are; and these factors have not been rendered more amendable to the guidance of reason and wisdom by the forms of zealous and intransigent nationalism which they have assumed in our times. Nor is the problem today simplified by the polarized East-West struggle between the Communist Bloc and the Atlantic Community; certainly not for the Near and Middle East, caught between these foci of power, and conditioned in action by past experience, each with the other.

This study of the modern experience of one of the most ancient of Christian minorities set in the heart of the Muslim Near East, exposed to the rivalry of imperialisms that constitutes an important part of the antecedents of the current East-West struggle, is a historian's laboratory for investigation of limited and relatively controllable data

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which should contribute substantial insight into this larger problem of the relationships of a minority to another politically and socially dominant cultural tradition. Moreover, the study should also contribute to more understanding between the West and the Muslim Near East, that each mending their ways accordingly, may achieve closer understanding and cooperation in the solution of the world's larger problem of East-West relationships in this perilous age of atomic power.

T. Cuyler Young
June 24, 1961

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PREFACE

(First Edition)

A number of Middle Eastern minorities are named after a religious leader with whom they have had either direct or indirect association; there are, for example, the Druzes, Maronites, Alawites, Jacobites, Yezidis, as well as the people who make up the subject of this study. Some of these sects are sometimes known by more than one name. In the case of the Nestorians, they are known also as Assyrians, a name commonly used in reference to them only since the First World War. Although I have used "Assyrian" in sections surveying the community's postwar history, I have adopted the term Nestorian because of its ancient usage. In spite of its original stigmatic connotation time has made respectable its use as the name of a historic millet.

Both of these names have to a certain extent colored the history of this small but once-flourishing Christian sect. A halo of romance seems to have surrounded the Nestorians who, as respected members of a community that cherished learning, contributed so much to that intellectual flowering for which the medieval Muslims became famous. Much also has been written in praise of the early Nestorian Church and its far-flung missionary enterprise. Indeed, the modern history of the Nestorians starts with Western endeavors to set aflame the ashes of their once-zealous church. As "Assyrians," on the other hand, writers have either romanticized them for their gallantry and integrity, or have suspected them as troublesome and rebellious, leaving unexplored important aspects of their history and diverse factors which have gone into its making. In this study I have tried to cover some of these important phases which have been left uninvestigated.

In the task of transliteration I have tried to be formal and consistent in the footnotes and bibliography but rarely have used diacritical marks in the text. For the transcription of Syriac titles I have adopted a system based on that used for Arabic.

In the preparation of this work I have incurred a great number of obligations to a great number of kind people. Any list of one's creditors must seem incomplete and perfunctory. Nevertheless, I take pleasure in acknowledging my gratitude to all those who have

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generously assisted me in my task. To the Department of Oriental Studies of Princeton University, which made possible the writing of this book through a grant from the University' Research Program in Near Eastern Studies, I owe special thanks. To the Chairman of that Department, Professor T. Cuyler Young, I am greatly indebted for his encouragement and support as well as for his writing to the Foreword. I am very grateful to the former chairman of the Department, and its founder, Professor Philip K. Hitti who in 1956 supervised my doctoral dissertation which has developed into this work. The author is under great obligation to another distinguished member of the Department of Oriental Studies, Professor Louis V. Thomas, for reading and criticizing the final work in manuscript. My thanks are also due to Mr. and Mrs. Roger Olden of Princeton who have read the whole manuscript, making useful suggestions from a layman's point of view.

I should like to put on record my gratitude to the writers of both past and present to whose labors of observation and interpretation most of the pages of this book owe a debt, and to the staffs of a number of archives and libraries in this country and abroad for their cooperation. In the bibliography I have tried to acknowledge these large debts. Here I wish to express my appreciation of a grant from the Ford Foundation which in 1954–56 helped make possible research in the Middle East and England. The Foundation is in no way responsible for any of the statements made or views held in this study.

Finally I wish to record my heavy debt to those with whom I have worked closely, to Mrs. James Holly Hanford, Editor at Princeton University Press, for carefully preparing the manuscript for the printer; and to my wife for rendering assistance in many ways and for her interest in my work.

John Joseph
Franklin and Marshall College
Lancaster, Pennsylvania
August 1961

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CHAPTER ONE

NESTORIANS, CHALDEANS, SYRIANS, ARAMEANS, ASSYRIANS

Just over a hundred years ago the Anglican missionaries Arthur J. Maclean and William H. Browne wrote their well-informed book *The Catholikos of the East and His People* (1892). They subtitled it "Some account of the customs of the Eastern Syrian Christians, otherwise variously known as Assyrians, Chaldeans, or Nestorians." East Syrians was the name used in Europe and America to distinguish these Aramaic-speaking Christians from the "West Syrians," more commonly known today as Syrian Orthodox ("Jacobites"). *East* referred to the pre-Islamic Parthian and Sasanian empires of Persia, including their territories in Mesopotamia. The use of these terms—Nestorians, Chaldeans, Syrians, Arameans, and Assyrians—in reference to the same Christian minority, depending on the user's preferred term, has continued to cause confusion. We will briefly survey the history of these various appelations, with emphasis on the most recent of them: Assyrians. Because of the nationalism that has flown from the adoption of that historic name, we shall conclude this chapter with a commentary on the relationship that the "modern Assyrians" claim exists between them and the ancients by that name.

Nestorians

Of the original Christian churches and rites of Western Asia, the "Nestorian" Church, formally known as The Church of the East (and as The Assyrian Church of the East since 1976), was one of the only two churches—the other being the Armenian Church—to grow outside the Roman Empire.[1] When the Nestorians of the Ottoman

[1] For a recent collection of scholarly articles on the early history of these two churches, see *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Periods*, edited by Nina G. Garsoïan, Thomas F. Mathews, and Robert W. Thomson. Washington, D.C. (Dumbarton Oaks, Center for Byzantine Studies), 1982. For the early beginnings of the East Syrian church, see also below, pp. 35ff.

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Empire and Qajar Iran became an important focus of attention of the Western Protestant missions in the nineteenth century, some writers took the position that the use of the name Nestorian in reference to these Christians went back only to the seventeenth century when a considerable number of them reconciled with the Roman Catholic Church and were organized by it into a separate body.[2] Those who remained loyal to their own mother church, we are told, were dubbed Nestorians. The community, of course, was referred to as Nestorian long before the seventeenth century.[3] Cosmas Indicopleustes spoke of "Nestorian" Christians as early as 525.[4] To the medieval Arab authors, they were known as *Nasṭurīyūn* or *al-Nasārā al-Nasṭūrīyah* (Nestorian Christians).[5] Toward the end of the thirteenth century the traveler Burchard referred to the Nestorians as constituting a "nation"; it was his impression that the jurisdiction of their prelate "reached much farther in the East than that of the entire Western Church."[6] Writing in mid-nineteenth century—when these Christians were yet to be called *Assyrians*—George P. Badger noted that he had in his possession an Arabic manuscript written by a Sleewa ibn Yohanan of Mosul, dated A.D. 1332, in which the author explained that the Eastern Christians were called Nestorians because they had refused to excommunicate and anathematize Nestorius at

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[2] William F. Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia* (London, 1842), II, 272; Horatio Southgate, *Narrative of a Tour through Armenia, Kurdistan, Persia and Mesopotamia* (London, 1840), II, 178–179; Austin H. Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains* (New York, 1851), I, 217. For details on the seventeenth-century schism, see below, pp. 55–58.

[3] Leonhart Rauwolff, *Itinerary into the Eastern Countries, as Syria, Palestine, or the Holy Land, Armenia, Mesopotamia, Assyria, Chaldea,* etc., trans. Nicholas Staphorst (London, 1693), pp. 22, 350–351. (Rauwolff's travels took place in 1573–1574.) Pedro Teixeira, who visited Baghdad in 1604, found eighty houses of "Nestorians" and ten of "Armenians." *The Travels of Pedro Teixeira,* translated and annotated by William F. Sinclair (London, 1902), pp. 66, 168, 252; see also Rafā'īl Bābu Isḥāq, *Ta'rīkh Naṣāra al-ʿIrāq mundh Intishār al-Naṣrānīyah fi al-Aqṭār al-ʿIrāqīyah ila Ayyāmina* (Baghdad, 1948), p. 124.

[4] See John Stewart, *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise* (Madras, 1928), pp. 89, 114, 328.

[5] al-Biruni, *al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah ʿan al-Qurūn al-Khāliyah,* ed. E. Sachau (Leipzig, 1878), pp. 288, 309; al-Shahrastani, *Kitāb al-Milal wa-al-Niḥal,* ed. W. Cureton (London, 1846), p. 175; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fi al-Milal wa-al-Ahwā wa-al-Niḥal* (Cairo, 1928), 1, 48. In modern times the term *al-Nasatira* is used in Arabic source.

[6] Burchard of Mount Sion, *A Description of the Holy Land,* trans. Aubrey Steward (London, 1896), p. 107 (in *Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society Library,* Vol. XII, Pt. 1). See also Abbé Carré, *The Travels of Abbé Carré in India and the Near East, 1672–1674* (London, 1947), I, 87.

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the request of Cyril (d. 444). "And this name," wrote Ibn Yohanan, "has been applied to us from that day up to the present."[7]

In time, these Eastern Christians began to refer to themselves as Nestorians. Mar 'Abd Yeshu' (Servant of Jesus), the Nestorian bishop of Nisibis in the thirteenth century, drew up a symbol of faith which he entitled "The Orthodox Creed of the Nestorians," and concluded the work with the statement that it was written in "the church of the blessed Nestorians."[8] The community continued to refer to itself as Nestorian through the nineteenth century. When in 1874 the Evangelical or Protestant section of the community was formally recognized as an organization separate from the mother church, it was referred to as the Reformed Nestorian Church.[9] Some of the more educated members of the community began to resent the appellation toward the end of the nineteenth century when Western missionaries, especially those of the Church of England, made them conscious of the stigma and reproach of "heresy" that the term Nestorian was originally intended to convey.[10] The Church was formally known simply as "The Old Church of the East."[11]

Chaldeans

The usage and origin of the name Chaldean has also been the subject of much acrimonious debate. While this term is generally accepted

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[7] George P. Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals* (London, 1852), I, 127–129. For the theology of Nestorius, and its condemnation, see below, pp. 40–41.

[8] *Ibid.*, 49.

[9] Badger notes that the Patriarch Mar Awraham Shamun told him that of all the Christians "Only we are Nestoraye." Coakley quotes a letter written in 1888 by Mar Iskhaq (Matran) Khnanishu saying "We, Eastern Nestorians . . ." J.F. Coakley, *The Church of the East and the Church of England*, (Oxford, 1992), pp. 141, 365 n. 8.

[10] John L. Mosheim, *An Ecclesiastical History, Ancient and Modern* (New York, 1867), I, 151; Arthur J. Maclean and William H. Browne, *The Catholicos of the East and His People* (London, 1892), p. 6; Coakley, under "Nestorian doctrine" in his index. See also below, pp. 40f.

[11] The preferred usage since 1976 has been The Assyrain Church of the East. While the hierarchy of the Church has followed the laity in choosing a "national" name, there has been at times a clash over this subject of names in the West Syrian (Jacobite or Syrian Orthodox) Church; the "national" and historical name preferred by the hierarchy is Aramean while a minority among the laity opt for Assyrian. For details, see chapter by Wolfhart Heinrichs entitled "The Modern Assyrians—Name and Nation," in *Festschrift Philologica Constantino Tsereteli Dicta*, ed. Silvio Zaorani (Turin, 1993), pp. 103, 111–12. See also below, pp. 9–10; 32n.113.

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today as referring to the Roman Catholic off-shoot of the Nestorian Church, it has in the past been used as a national name in reference to both branches. Nineteenth-century European writers, in order to distinguish between the two churches, have referred to them as Nestorian Chaldeans and Catholic Chaldeans.[12] In 1840, Ainsworth, one of the first few non-Catholic Europeans to visit the Nestorians, reported that these people considered themselves Chaldeans and "descendants of the ancient Chaldeans of Assyria, Mesopotamia and Babylonia." In order to distinguish between the two branches of the Church, explained Ainsworth, the term Nestorian was invented in 1681 for those who retained their ancient faith.[13]

Austin Henry Layard, who unearthed the ruins of Nineveh during the first half of the nineteenth century,[14] like Ainsworth, believed that the term Nestorian was coined during the seventeenth-century schism, noting that the people had always referred to themselves as Chaldean.[15] Layard reported that in the chapel of Rabban Hurmizd, where the Nestorian patriarchs once resided, there were tombs of several patriarchs buried there long before the schism; the title carved upon their monuments, he wrote, was "Patriarch of the Chaldeans of the East."[16] Layard, however, is contradicted by Badger who claimed to have examined "all the epitaphs" with care and could not discover any phraseology to confirm Layard.[17] According to Badger the title inscribed on all the tombs was "Patriarchs and Occupants of the Throne of Addai and Mari,"[18] a title by which some Nestorian patriarchs had at times designated themselves. Reproductions of the early epitaphs confirm Badger's criticism of Layard, but do not support Badger's own reading of the inscriptions.[19]

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[12] Claudius J. Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan and on the Site of Ancient Nineveh* (London, 1836), II, 276; I, 275n, 277n. See also Jean B. Piolet, *Missions catholiques françaises au XIX siècle* (Paris, 1901), I, 223; Ainsworth, II, 198, 223; Mary Sheil, *Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia* (London, 1856), p. 349; Joseph Wolff, *Travels and Adventures of the Rev. Joseph Wolff* (London, 1861), pp. 223, 457.

[13] Ainsworth, II, 272.

[14] For details on these excavations, see pp. 15–16 below.

[15] Layard, *Nineveh*, I, 5, 217.

[16] *Ibid.*, I, 199.

[17] Badger, I, 181.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] For reproductions of the epitaphs in question, see Kurkīs Ḥanna ʿAwwād, *Athar Qadīm fi al-ʿIrāq—Dayr al-Rabbān Hurmiz* (Mosul, 1934), pp. 35, 37, and Jacques Vosté, "Les Inscriptions de Rabban Hormuzd et de N.-D. des Semences pres d'Alqos (Iraq)," *Le Museon*, 43 (1930), pp. 263–316. The pre-nineteenth century titles inscribed

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The American missionaries Eli Smith and H.G.O. Dwight,[20] who visited the Nestorians a decade before Layard and Ainsworth, reported that the congregation that converted to Roman Catholicism from the Nestorian Church was dignified by the name "the Chaldean Church" during the seventeenth-century schism. Two other American missionaries, Justin Perkins and Asahel Grant, both of whom, again, visited the community prior to Ainsworth and Layard, made the same observation. The term Chaldean, wrote Grant, is seldom applied to the Nestorians; in no case does it seem to be applied to them prior to the period of the split. Horatio Southgate, who was touring the region in the early 1830s, wrote that the Nestorians "call themselves, as they seem always to have done," *Chaldeans*; indeed, "Chaldean" was their "national name," he stressed. Interestingly, after Southgate became aware that it was Grant's firm position that the Nestorians did not use the name Chaldean in reference to themselves, and that they were the descendants of the Lost Tribes of the Old Testament, he (Southgate) became more self assertive. He wrote that "undoubtedly" these *Syrians* were "descendants of the Assyrians and not of the Jews." His source: "Those of them who profess to have any idea concerning their origin." According to that same source, the "Jacobites" were descendants of the Arameans—"the Syrians whose chief city was Damascus."[21]

Smith and Dwight were in error when they asserted that "Chaldean" was the nomenclature adopted in the seventeenth century. In the late seventeenth century, French Biblical critic Richard Simon spoke

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are simply "Catholicos Patriarch of the East," or "Patriarch of the East," and, occasionally, simply "Catholicos." Badger had seen "The impression of a [patriarchal] seal" bearing the title "Patriarch and Occupant of the throne of Addai and Mari," but reproductions of the epitaphs do not bear him out. For the revision of this note the author is indebted to Dr. H.L. Murre-van den Berg, who brought the extensive Vosté article on these inscriptions to his attention. For more information on Nestorian patriarchal titles see below, pp. 22–23, and Thomas of Marga, *The Book of Governors*, ed. and tr. E.A.W. Budge (London, 1893), I, clxxi, and letter from the Nestorian patriarch sent to Mr. Perkins in 1836, literally translated and printed in *The Missionary Herald*, 33 (1837), 55 and *ibid.*, 36 (1840), 305; the title used is simply "Patriarch of the East."

[20] For other references to Smith and Dwight, see below, pp. 65, 67.

[21] Horatio Southgate, *Narrative of a Tour through Armenia, Kurdistan, Persia and Mesopotamia*, 2 vols. (New York, 1840), vol. 2, pp. 182–183. Cf. Coakley, *op. cit.*, p. 367 n. 12, and Heinrichs, *op. cit.*, p. 110, n. 20. See also Asahel Grant, *The Nestorians, or The Lost Tribes*, (London, 1841), pp. 198–199; Justin Perkins, *A Residence of Eight Years in Persia among the Nestorian Christians* (New York, 1843), p. 4. For more on Grant and his thesis on Nestorian origins, see below, p. 37.

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of the many Christian sects in the East "who bear the name Chaldean or Syrian" and mentioned that most of the Chaldeans "are those whom we call Nestorians."[22] Pope Paul V (1605–1621) wrote to Patriarch Elias that "A great part of the East was infected by this heresy [Nestorianism], especially the Chaldeans, who for this reason have been called Nestorians."[23] As far back as 1445 the Nestorians of the See of Cyprus were called Chaldeans upon their reconciliation with the Church of Rome.[24]

Why were the Nestorians called Chaldeans? One of the earliest authors who refers to them as "children of the ancient Chaldeans" is Ibn al-ʿIbri (Barhebraeus, also known as Gregory Abu al-Faraj), the renowned thirteenth-century catholicos of the rival West Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) Church. But, as we shall soon see, he used the term in a derogatory manner. Assemani, the scholar most probably responsible for the propagation of the term Chaldean, had explained simply, and rightly, that "the Nestorians are generally called Chaldaic Christians, because their principal, or head church, is in the ancient Chaldea."[25]

When the Roman Catholic branch of the Nestorian Church was established in the seventeenth century, its new primate was styled the Patriarch of Babylon, another old and dignified title that the Nestorian patriarchs had used when they flourished at Seleucia-Ctesiphon before the advent of Islam.[26] The new Catholic patriarch was also referred to as the Patriarch of the Chaldeans of the East, clearly indicating a confusion of geographical and ethnic terms. Some scholars have even suggested that the use of Babylon in the title of the Uniat patriarch is due to the erroneous seventeenth-century identification of modern Baghdad with ancient Babylon.[27] Be that as it may, it was because of the *geographical* location of their patriarchate, and not because of their ethnic origin, that the East Syrians

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[22] Richard Simon, *Histoire critique de la créance et des coutumes des nations du levant* (Frankford, Holland, 1684), p. 83.

[23] Joseph S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca orientalis*, iv (Rome, 1721), 75.

[24] One of the ruined churches of Famagusta in Cyprus continued to be known as the Nestorian Church. See Camille Enlart, *L'Art gothique et la renaissance en Chypre* (Paris, 1899), pp. 356–365.

[25] Assemani, III, ii, 177.

[26] See *Sunhadus*, ix, 1.

[27] J. Labourt, "Chaldean Christians," *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*; H. Dressler, "Baghdad," *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*. See also Donald Attwater, *Catholic Eastern Churches* (London, 1935), p. 231n; Buṭrus Naṣri, "Lamʿah fi al-Abrashīyāt al-Kaldānīyah wa-Silsilāt Asāqifatuha," *al-Mashriq*, 9 (1906), 640; Badger, I, 153.

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(Nestorians) were called Chaldeans. The various names by which they were known, and the titles bestowed by the Roman Catholic Church upon their patriarchs, had such other exotic combinations as "Chaldeans of Assyria," and "Eastern Chaldeans of Catholic Assyria," nomenclatures that were "hardly ever used" by the Nestorian patriarchs or their people themselves. They employed such familiar and traditional titles as "Patriarch of the Orient," "Servant of the Seat of Saint Thadae"; in the seventeenth century, according to Fiey, Simon VIII Dinha referred to himself in a letter addressed to Pope Clement X, simply as "Servant of the Patriarchal Seat which is in the East."[28]

As for Ibn al-'Ibri's reference to the Nestorians as "descendants of the Chaldeans,"[29] a careful reading shows that he used the term to be facetious. He spoke of the Aramaic language as split into various dialects, some of them quite unintelligible, such as the dialect of those "wonderful Easterners," "children of the ancient Chaldeans," in whose tongue "there is no difference between *pthaha* and *zqafa*" [vocalization marks].[30] By Chaldean, Ibn al-'Ibri meant "magicians" and "sorcerers," in the same sense as used in Daniel (2:2,10). Indeed, in one of his better-known books, Ibn al-'Ibri defines "Kaldayutha"—Chaldeeism—as "astrology and the art of magic."[31]

Another reason for calling the Nestorians "Chaldeans" is that their mother tongue, a dialect of Aramaic, was identified with the so-called

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[28] For the profusion of patriarchial titles granted by the Roman Catholic Church, see J.-M. Fiey, "'Assyriens' ou 'Araméens'?", *L'Orient syrien*, 10 (1965), pp. 146–148 and his more recent, posthumously published article, "Comment l'Occident en vint à parler de 'Chaldéen?" in *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 78 (Autumn, 1996), pp. 163–170. See also Layard, *Nineveh*, I, 199; Samuel Giamil, *Ktawa d'Mat'aninwāti d''Īta d'Kaldāyi 'am Kūrsya Shlīkhaya d'Rūmi* (Rome, 1902), p. 208.

[29] Hormuzd Rassam, "Biblical Nationalities Past and Present," *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, 8 (1885), 373; Buṭrus Naṣri and Addi Salība Ibrāhīna, "Ṭa'ifat al-Kaldān al-Kathūlīk," *al-Mashriq*, 3 (1900), 818.

[30] Ibn al-'Ibri, *M'alta L'gramatīqi* (Jerusalem, 1916), pp. vii–viii, manuscript in the library of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Bishopric of Beirut.

[31] Ibn al-'Ibri, *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj*, trans. E.Q. Wallis Budge (London, 1932), 1, 7; see also *ibid.*, pp. 9, 52. For the meaning of Chaldean, see Ya'qub A. Manna, *Margi Pighyanāyi d'Mardūta d'Aramāyi* (Mosul, 1901), pp. 4f. Ibn al-'Ibri obviously was not aware of the ancient Chaldeans' achievements in astronomy. As early as the seventh century B.C., the study of astronomy in Babylon had begun to conform to present reckoning; lunar year had 354 days, regulated into 12 months, alternating between 29 and 30 days. See Bernard Grun, *The Timetables of History* (New York, 1975), p. 11. For the various usages of the term Chaldean, including its reference to a priestly class, see F. Rochberg-Halton, "New evidence for the History of Astrology," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 43 (1984), 115–16.

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Chaldee language. Rassam wrote that "the present Chaldeans [members of both the Nestorian Church and its Catholic offshoot], with few exceptions, speak the same dialect that is used in the Targums, and in some parts of Ezra and Daniel, which are called Chaldee."[32] To bolster his theory that the Nestorians were descendants of the ancient Chaldeans, Rassam drew upon classical historical sources and asserted that Xenophon had called the inhabitants of northern Mesopotamia "Chaldeans." By "Chaldeans" Xenophon meant the inhabitants of Urartu, (the ancient Assyrian name of the country later called Armenia), who are also known as Haldians, Khaldians, and Chaldeans. Interestingly, when Xenophon and his ten thousand passed through Assyria just over two-hundred years after the fall of the Assyrian empire, he found the region sparsely populated and identified the sites of Nimrud and Nineveh as ruined Median cities and referred to their former inhabitants as Medes.[33]

"Chaldean," therefore, like "Nestorian," was used long before the seventeenth-century schism and was used in reference to all the East Syrians because of the geographical location of their "head church." In the seventeenth century, the Roman Catholic Church abstained from calling the members of the Uniat branch by the "heretical" name Nestorian; the Uniats became Catholic Chaldeans. When the terms Chaldean and Nestorian were thus strictly differentiated, members of the mother church (Nestorian), claiming the same relationship to the inhabitants of ancient Babylon as their Catholic brethren, began also to use the name Chaldean. Nestorian patriarchs occasionally used "Chaldean" in formal documents, claiming to be the "real Patriarchs" of the whole "Chaldean Church" even though the Uniat branch did not accept the Nestorian claims as lawful. But while the Nestorians wanted to deny the Uniats exclusive right to the historic name Chaldean, that term never became attached to them (the Nestorians). From the nineteenth century on, when the present-day Uniat branch was permanently organized and officially recognized

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[32] For more on the relationship between the ancient Chaldeans and Arameans and their languages, see below, p. 12.

[33] See Xenophon's *Anabasis*, II, iv to III, v and *passim*. Throughout his celebrated memoir, Xenophon designates Assyria by the name of Media. See Eduard Meyer, "Media," in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (11th ed.). See also David Oates, *Studies in the Ancient History of Northern Iraq*. London, (Oxford, 1968), p. 60; M. Rostovtzeff, *A History of the Ancient World* (Oxford, 1925), I, 117; J. Friedrich, *Extinct Languages* (New York, 1957), p. 81; A.T.E. Olmstead, *History of Assyria* (New York, 1923), pp. 100–111; H.R. Hall, *The Ancient History of the Near East* (London, 1947), pp. 458–459.

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by the Ottoman government,[34] we find the term Chaldean losing its "national" connotation and coming to mean only the name of a religious denomination, the Catholic Chaldeans, formerly Nestorians.

Syrians (Suraye, Suroyo, Suryani), Arameans

Throughout the nineteenth century the Nestorians were also referred to as Syrians by European travelers and writers. Indeed, "Syrians" (*Suraye/Suroyo*) was the name by which the "Nestorians" and "Jacobites" called themselves until the post-World War I period; thereafter, *Suraye* was gradually replaced among the "Nestorians" by *Aturaye*, the name of the ancient Assyrians in Syriac. The "Jacobites" continue to call themselves *Suroyo*.[35]

The designations Syria and Syrian were derived from Greek usage long before Christianity.[36] When the Greeks became better acquainted with the Near East, especially after Alexander the Great overthrew the Achaemenian empire in the 4th century B.C., they restricted the name Syria to the lands west of the Euphrates. During the 3rd century B.C., when the Hebrew Bible was translated by Jewish scholars into the Greek Septuagint for the use of the Hellenized Jews of Alexandria, the terms for "Aramean" and "Aramaic" in the Hebrew Bible, were translated into "Syrian" and "the Syrian tongue" respectively.[37] In Palestine itself, according to Nöldeke, the Jews and later

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[34] See below, pp. 57–58.

[35] An encyclical presented to the faithful in 1981 by their Patriarch, Ignatius Zakka Iwas, covered, among other matters, "the issue of the true name" of the Church. That name, the encyclical confirmed, is the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch ('idto suryoyto orthodoxoyto dantiokh), and its language is known as the Syriac language; (leshono suryoyo), and its people by the Syrian people ('amo suryoyo). Any other name "is not only alien and foreign, but also a distortion, falsification and forgery of the historical truth." For the text of the Encyclical in the Arabic language, see *Al-Majallah al-Baṭriyarkīyah* (1981), pp. 386–389. The author is grateful to Dr. George A. Kiraz for providing him with a copy of that article as well as its translation as it appears on the Internet, where the document is maintained by the Editorial Board of the Syrian Orthodox Resources, last updated on December 14, 1997.

[36] It is important to remember that the Greco-Roman period of Middle Eastern history lasted almost exactly one thousand years; known as the Hellenistic Period, it was brought to an end by the Arab conquests of the seventh century A.D.

[37] The Authorized Version of the Bible continued to use the same terms that the Septuagint had adopted. In 1970, the New English Bible, published by Oxford and Cambridge University presses, and translated by biblical scholars drawn from various British universities, went back to the original Hebrew terms, using Aram and Aramaeans for Syria and Syrians respectively.

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the Christians there, referred to their dialect of Aramaic as Syriac; in Babylon, both Greeks and Persians called the Arameans *Syrians*.[38] The second-century B.C. Greek historian Posidonius, a native of Syria, noted that "the people we [Greeks] call Syrians were called by the Syrians themselves Aramaeans . . . for the people in Syria are Arameans."[39]

From their humble beginnings as wandering tribesmen, the Arameans emerged by the end of the second millennium B.C. as an important factor in the cultural, political and economic life of southwestern Asia. During this early period, Wayne T. Pitard refers to the Arameans as "one of the most important ethnic groups in the Near East." Aramean tribes attained great power in the large areas on both sides of the Syrian desert, eventually succeeding in settling and establishing ruling dynasties there. The most important Aramean kingdom was that of Aram, centered in Damascus, described as "the strongest and most influential power in the western fertile crescent," and one of the "most significant states in the whole of the Levant."[40] The kingdom enjoyed a central position in the political life of the Near East, dominating the region's main international trade routes; it used the Aramaic idiom of Damascus as the administrative language in all of its provinces, as well as the language of diplomacy and commerce beyond its borders.

While the most important territories penetrated by the Arameans were in geographical Syria, we find them also in distant regions, stretching from Tur Abdin to Nisibin, which during the Christian

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[38] See T. Nöldeke, "Semitic Languages," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., p. 625; Nöldeke also notes that it is, "properly speaking, incorrect to employ the word 'Syriac' as meaning the language of Edessa alone" even though Edessan Aramaic has the best claim to it.

[39] See J.G. Kidd, *Posidonius* (Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries, 1988), vol. 2, pt. 2, pp. 955–956. Consult also Arthur J. Maclean, "Syrian Christians," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*; Frederic Macler, "Syrians (or Aramaeans)" in *ibid.*, where the two terms are "taken for granted" to have been originally synonymous. Consult also Sebastian Brock, "Eusebius and Syriac Christianity," in Harold W. Attridge and Gohei Hata, eds., *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism* (Leiden, 1992), p. 226. See also T. Nöldeke, "Assyrios, Syrios, Syros," in *Hermes*, 1871, p. 461, and Heinrichs, pp. 103–105.

[40] See Benjamin Mazar, "Aramean empire and its relations with Israel," *Biblical Archaeologist*, 25 (December, 1962), 101–102, 112–117. For more on the Arameans, see also Wayne T. Pitard, *Ancient Damascus: A Historical Study of the Syrian City-State* (Winona Lake, Indiana, 1987); Abraham Malamat, *The Arameans in Aram Naharaim and the Rise of Their States* (Jerusalem, 1952); Emil Kraeling, *Aram and Israel or, Arameans in Syria and Mesopotamia* (Columbia University Oriental Studies: No. 13, reprint ed.)

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era, centuries later, would be the homegrounds of some of the Syrian Christians noted in this chapter.[41] By the end of the 10th century B.C. and the beginnings of the 9th, Assyrian inscriptions for the first time inform us of Aramean political units in northern Mesopotamia, while in the southern parts of that country their confederacies remained a chronic menace to the Assyrians until their their very downfall. The Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I (1115–1076 B.C.) has recorded that he conducted 28 campaigns against the Arameans; his namesake, Tiglath-Pileser III, some 350 years later, was still engaging Arameans in war. It was in the 9th and 8th centuries B.C. when the Arameans were defeated; in 720 B.C. Sargon II finally brought to an end the Aramean kingdoms of the west; their territories were incorporated into the Neo-Assyrian provincial system, a century and a decade before Assyria itself was overthrown.

The expansion of Assyrian rule over lands beyond the Euphrates, however, became a major burden to the Assyrians and proved to be a suicidal act. They subdued all the Aramean, Phoenician, and Hebrew communities in what Toynbee calls "the homeland of Syriac Civilization," but this hastened the Aramean "cultural conquest of their military conquerors," proceeding "*pari passu* with the extension of the Assyrians' domination over the Syriac World."[42] Even before its western expansion beyond the Euphrates river, the Assyrian empire had found it necessary to use an Aramaic dialect of geographical Syria as its official language, a move dictated by the wide expanse of Aramaic and the convenience of its alphabet and script. With a much larger Aramean population now under its rule, far removed from the Assyria homebase, the smaller, ethnically-Assyrian population could not resist aramaization, a process that gradually transformed the cultural face of the empire, "leading to the Assyrians being outlived and absorbed."[43] Before too long, Aramaic had displaced

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[41] Glenn M. Schwartz, "The origins of the Arameans in Syria and northern Mesopotamia: Research problems and potential strategies," in *To The Euphrates and Beyond, archaeological studies in honour of Mauritis N. van Loon*, ed. O.M.C. Haex, *et al.* (Rotterdam, 1989), pp. 277–279. For a map showing the widespread Aramean migrations by the 11th century B.C., see H.W.F. Saggs, *The Might That Was Assyria*, (London, 1984), p. 67.

[42] See Toynbee, *History* (1954), vol. viii, pp. 440–441 and vol. xii (1961), p. 393. Consult also Richard N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia* (Mentor Book edition, 1966 printing), pp. 80–81; "Assyrian *political* expansion," writes Frye, was accompanied by "the Aramaean *ethnic* expansion."

[43] Consult H. Tadmor's chapter "The Aramaization of Assyria: Aspects of Western

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Akkadian even as the language of everyday speech within Assyria itself. According to H.W.F. Saggs, the cities of Assyria proper had become so cosmopolitan and polyglot, that people of actual Assyrian descent were possibly a minority within those cities.[44] The dominance of Aramaic over Akkadian in both speech and writing was so extensive in the 8th century B.C., that Aramaic *script*—not Aramaic language—came to be called in Egyptian, Greek and Hebrew languages as "Assyrian writing."[45]

The momentous but imperceptible changes that led to the aramaization of the Assyrians coincided with the steady decline of their empire, especially after the death of King Assurbanipal. His weak successors could not cope with the "festering problem of Babylonia," where the rising power of the Chaldeans and their Aramean allies helped build the Neo-Babylonian empire.[46] With Assyrian political and military power gone, Aramean ethnicity, language and script remained and continued to expand, facilitating the absorption process farther, peacefully penetrating "the Babylonic body social." The high point of Aramaic was reached under the Achaemenids (539–332 B.C.), when the influence of Aramaic language and script went beyond their former boundaries. Aramaic now attained official status in all Achaemenian territories, including Egypt and Anatolia.[47] Under the Iranians[48] Aramaic was also used for all aspects of written communication and records, emerging by about the sixth century B.C. as the *lingua franca* of Western Asia, and by the beginning

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Impact," in H.J. Nissen and J. Renger. eds., *Mesopotamien und Seine Nachbarn*, (Berlin, 1987), vol. 2, p. 459. See also Saggs, *loc. cit.*, pp. 125 seq.

[44] See also below, pp. 27–29.

[45] See Joseph Naveh and Jonas C. Greenfield, "Hebrew and Aramaic in the Persian Period," in *Cambridge History of Judaism* (1984), v. 1, pp. 126–127. Richard C. Steiner's research points to Egyptians as the first who called Aramaic writing "Assyrian script." The Greek *Assyria Grammata* (script of Assyria) and Hebrew *Ktab Ashuri* are derived from the Egyptian Demotic, directly in the case of Greek, indirectly in the case of Hebrew. Steiner speaks of the Egyptians being "Far enough away and insular enough not to feel the need to distinguish Aram from Assyria." Consult his article, "Why the Aramaic Script was called 'Assyrian' in Hebrew, Greek, and Demotic," in *Orientalia* (Rome: Pontificium institutum biblicum), 62 (1993), pp. 80–82.

[46] Saggs, *The Might that Was Assyria*, pp. 89, 95, 99; Frye, *Heritage of Persia*, pp. 80 seq.

[47] Toynbee (1954), vol. viii, pp. 440–442. See also J.C. Greenfield, "Aramaic in the Achaemenian Empire," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, v. 2, p. 709.

[48] The terms Iran and Iranians will be used interchangeably with Persia and Persians.

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of the fifth century, as the common dialect of all the peoples of the the region. In his article "Aramaic in the Achaemenian Empire," J.C. Greenfield speaks of "ethnic groups of varied cultural backgrounds throughout the vast expanse of the Persian realm" who used Aramaic language and writing.[49] Unlike the Assyrians, the Persians *did not forget their own mother tongue*; they maintained their national-linguistic identity, largely because their own Aramaic-speaking subjects did not predominate from within Persia as they did in the core region of Assyria, later known as *Bait Aramaye*—home of the Arameans. (With the advent of Islam, centuries after the Achaemenids, Sasanian Persians were also able to resist arabization; they liberally borrowed from the Arabic vocabulary and even adopted the Arabic script, but they were able to Persianize what they borrowed. In the case of the Assyrians and other ethnicities aramaization was total just as the absorption of the various other peoples would be, centuries later, through arabization.) Hebrew University Professor Benjamin Mazar, cited above, writes that an impressive phenomenon in the history of the Arameans is their tradition of unity and distinctiveness, which remained unimpaired even in their period of decline.

One of the casualties of Alexander the Great's destruction of the Achaemenian empire was the Aramaic *koine*. The universal Imperial Aramaic tongue was "deliberately replaced," writes Toynbee, by the Greek *koine*, a dialect of ancient Greek. From the third century B.C., Greek became the language of learning, diplomacy and commerce; it expanded especially rapidly along the Mediterranean coast in Phoenician and Philistine cities, and then to the lands beyond. Aramaic survived in the countryside but the old standard language and alphabet broke up into local dialects. Some of these local vernaculars continued to play major roles, developing different and separate alphabets such as Syriac, Mandaic, Palmyrene, Nabataean, Jewish and Samaritan.[50] The future of Aramaic now lay with the dialects of Eastern Aramaic of Mesopotamia and Babylonia, as influenced by the local dialects of the non-Aramaic languages there. The monuments of the major Eastern Aramaic dialects of Mesopotamia and Babylon were

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[49] *Loc. cit.* See also Roux, *op. cit.* (1992 ed.), pp. 276, 411–412.

[50] Toynbee, xii (1961), pp. 442–443, citing A. Dupont-Sommer's *Les araméens* (Paris, 1949), pp. 98–102. See also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean* (Ann Arbor, 1979), p. 71, where he notes that of the various forms of Aramaic, the closest to old Official Aramaic seems to be that represented in Palestine.

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the Babylonian Talmud, the scriptures of the Madaean religion, and the Christian literature in Syriac.[51]

The Aramaic dialects of Mesopotamia and Babylonia that survived the introduction of the Greek *koine*, and even revived after the Christian era, had not been used as literary languages during the Assyrian and Achaemenian times. According to Stephen A. Kaufman, the historical core of the Official Aramaic adopted by the Assyrians and Persians was located geographically and typologically somewhere between Gozan and Aleppo. Syriac, the major Eastern dialect with which we are concerned, was the Aramaic dialect of Edessa; it gradually became the new unofficial koine for all of the various Christian sects. Even before the Christian period, the Edessan dialect had become the literary language in and around Edessa, but it attained special prominence there in the 2nd century A.D., when it gradually became the literary language of what Nöldeke called "Aramaean Christendom." Its importance increased with the expansion of Christianity in Mesopotamia from the beginning of the 3rd century on. As the language into which the Bible was translated, it became the venerable language of the Aramaic-speaking Christians of Mesopotamia and Persia—then both under Parthian rule. As the language of the Church and its liturgy, Syriac also became the language of literature and correspondence, the way Quranic Arabic—a dialect of Mecca—became the "classical" language of Arabic literature and written communication from the seventh century on.

The Aramaic-speaking inhabitants continued to use their varied local dialects for everyday speech alongside classical Syriac.[52] According to Kaufman, one finds no traces of the Assyrianized Aramaic in these lesser, local dialects that might have been there at one time; they were eliminated, he explains, by the shifting population groups and possibly by the early demise of the Assyrian Empire.[53] Under

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[51] See also Raymond A. Bowman, "Arameans, Aramaic, and the Bible," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 7 (April, 1948), pp. 84–87. For studies on the various divisions and phases of Aramaic, see Fitzmyer, *ibid.*, pp. 57–84; Franz Rosenthal, *Die Aramäistsche Forschung, op. cit.*, and his article "Aramaic Studies during the Past Thirty Years," in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 37 (1978), 81–91. The only remains of the Western Aramaic dialects still spoken on the soil of geographical Syria are those used in Ma'lula and the nearby villages of Bakh'a and Jubb 'Adin. See Murre-van den Berg, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

[52] For more on the revival of Syriac during the Hellenistic and Islamic period, see below, pp. 50ff.

[53] See Stephen A. Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, Assyriological Studies, No. 19, 1974), pp. 160, 164–165 and

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Islam, the local Aramaic dialects were gradually displaced even as spoken languages, paving the way for the islamization and arabization of the vast majority of the Aramaic-speaking population. Members of the various Christian churches discussed in this chapter are the majority of those who to this day speak a dialect of Aramaic.[54]

Assyrians

It was in 1843 when the French Consular agent at Mosul, Paul Emile Botta, began his diggings in Khorsabad, about 12 miles north of Mosul, and uncovered the ruins of the magnificent palace of Sargon II, King of Assyria (722–705 B.C.). That same year the British excavations, under Austin Henry Layard, discovered the majestic palace of Shalmaneser I (ca. 884–860 B.C.) with its winged bulls, followed later by that of Ashurbanipal (668–ca. 626 B.C.), with his library's vast collection of cuneiform tablets. These and other splendid collections would soon adorn the museums of London, Paris, and Berlin and, most important of all, a lost chapter in the history of civilization would be retrieved.

Before too long, in one of the greatest triumphs of human ingenuity, the cuneiform writing impressed on clay tablets or chiseled in stone, was deciphered. Assyrian texts, in Akkadian language, were soon read with the same certainty as Hebrew and Syriac. In 1860, the great corpus *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia* was published by Sir Edward Rawlinson, with the help of Edwin Norris and George Smith; about 1835, Rawlinson had deciphered the Persian portion of the trilingual inscription of Behistun.[55]

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p. 165 n. 105. See also *idem.*, "Reflections on the Assyrian-Aramaic Bilingual from Tell Fakhariyeh," *Maarav*, 3/2 (1982), 152.

[54] For details on the present state of these dialects, see Zomaya S. Solomon, "The State of Spoken Aramaic Today," in *Proceedings*, Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies (1986), pp. 23–30.

[55] The Ashurbanipal palace library's 22,000 clay tablets cover subjects in history, medicine, astronomy, astrology and recorded information on the movement of planets and signs of the zodiac. For the fascinating story of these early excavations and their translation, see C. Wade Meade, *Road to Babylon, Development of U.S. Assyriology* (Leiden, 1974). After World War II the excavations at Nimrud were re-opened (1949) by Max Mallowan on behalf of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq. The team worked there until 1963, under the direction of David Oates. Since 1963 several teams have excavated at Nimrud, including an expedition from the British

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What especially fascinated the Christian West by these archaeological excavations was that a few of these Assyrian monuments, starting with the reign of King Shalmaneser, dealt at some length with the history of the same events that were narrated in the Bible. Most of the kings of Israel and Judah from Jehu onward were mentioned in the annals of the Assyrian kings. One of the two most dramatic finds was the Black Obelisk, excavated by Layard at Nimrud in 1846 and now one of the most popular treasures of the British Museum in London. The obelisk, a four sided, 6 1/2-foot-high stela, carved with five registers of relief sculptures, displays 190 lines of text. There King Shalmaneser III describes 31 of his military campaigns, including his forays in Asia Minor, Media, Babylonia, and the Persian Gulf. One of the registers portrays the Israelite King Jehu, or one of his emissaries, paying tribute to Shalmaneser, a rare reference to a Biblical king in a contemporary extra-biblical source.[56]

The Bible-reading public was well familiar with these Assyrian names and events; they had been part of British and American cultural consciousness, wrote Assyriologist H.W.F. Saggs. The history of the ancient Hebrew kingdoms of Israel and Judeh, noted Saggs, "was a living thing, as generally known as British history."[57] To the Jews and the Western Christians of the nineteenth century, the most important thing about the newly-discovered tablets and monuments was that they had proven the Hebrew Bible to be right. The general public in England began to view the Assyrian sources as a weapon to be used primarily against Biblical "Higher Criticism" as then applied to the Old Testament.[58]

Museum in 1989. For a summary article see John Curtis, "Nimrud: Ancient and Modern," *The Illustrated London News*, 280 (Summer, 1992), 75–77.

[56] For biblical references to Jehu, see 2K 9:14, 10:4. An article in a recent issue of the journal *Biblical Archaeology Review*, entitled "Did King Jehu Kill His Own Family?", attempts to reconcile the Biblical text with that of the Black Obelisk. The Assyriologist author remarks that modern Biblical scholarship generally concludes that Assyrian information is reliable within certain parameters. The Hebrew Bible, writes Tammi Schneider, "does not refute the Assyrian information, it simply does not mention it." 21 (January–February 1995), 26–33, 80–82.

[57] Saggs, *The Might That Was Assyria*, pp. 290, 305–6, and his booklet, published by the University of Wales Press in 1969 entitled *Assyriology and the Study of the Old Testament*—an inaugural lecture delivered at University College, Cardiff.

[58] D.J. Wiseman, *The Expansion of Assyrian Studies*, (London, 1962), p. 11. If some cuneiform tablets corroborated parts of the historical books of the Bible, others seemed to challenge their originality. In the 1870s George Smith stirred England with the announcement of his discovery of a tablet containing a parallel to the legend of the deluge in Genesis. Other tablets he deciphered contained, he reported,

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Nestorians and Chaldeans Proclaimed Remains of Nineveh and Assyria

When the Assyrian excavations revealed the remains of Nineveh to the wondering eyes of the world, the Nestorians and their "Chaldean" brethren in the environs of the ancient Assyrian capital and beyond attracted special attention. The hero of these excavations, Austin Henry Layard, hastened to proclaim these historic, linguistic, and religious minorities to be "as much the remains of Nineveh, and Assyria, as the rude heaps and ruined palaces."[59] In the midst of this excitement, J.P. Fletcher wrote that "the Chaldeans and the Nestorians" are "the only surviving human memorial of Assyria and Babylonia."[60]

While the name Chaldeans was already, as we have seen, appropriated by those Nestorians who had embraced Roman Catholicism, the illustrious twin name 'Assyrians' was eventually adopted by the Nestorians as a name for themselves. Interestingly, Layard and Hormuzd Rassam continued to use the older and more familiar name Chaldean and applied it to both the Chaldean Catholics and "Nestorians."[61] Coakley notes a dispute that Rassam had with Arthur J. Maclean of the Anglican mission in Qochanis in 1889 over the names "Syrians" and "Assyrians," when Maclean argued against the term "Assyrians"—"Why should we invent a name when we have such a very convenient one, used for centuries, at our hand?" It was

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accounts of the origin of the world, the creation of animals and man, and the fall of man from a sinless state. Such documents fueled Biblical criticism adding to the secular challenges to revealed religion that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discoveries in geology, anthropology and biology had already produced. The Assyrian documents, it was argued, now proved that the ancient Hebrews, like other peoples, had simply added to what they had borrowed from much older neighboring cultures; that it was Christian bias which placed Israel/Palestine at center stage. See George Smith, *The Chaldean Account of Genesis* (New York, 1876), p. 17. See also Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia, Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 7 *seq.*, and H.W.F. Saggs, *The Encounter with the Divine in Mesopotamia and Israel.* London, 1978. Consult also Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, published in 1859 when the excitement of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian excavations was reaching its peak. For a delightful account of these challenges, read Naomi Shepherd, *The Zealous Intruders, The Western Rediscovery of Palestine* (London, 1987); see also Emil G. Kraeling, *The Old Testament since the Reformation*, (New York, 1955) pp. 91 seq.; S.J. Barrows, "Assyriology and the Bible," *Unitarian Review and Religious Magazine*, 12 (1879), *seq.* 46, and George Sarton, *History of Science* (Baltimore, 1927–1949), vol. 1, p. 246.

[59] Layard, *Nineveh*, I, 5.

[60] J.P. Fletcher, *Notes from Nineveh and Travels in Mesopotamia, Assyria, and Syria* (Philadelphia, 1850), p. 188. Fletcher was Badger's lay companion sent by the Archbishop of Canterbury to begin work among the Nestorians in 1842.

[61] See above, pp. 3ff.

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understandable, he agreed, that someone living so close to the ruins of Nineveh, "should have a fit of enthusiasm of Old Assyria," but "is it common sense to cast aside the name used by the people themselves [*Suraye*] and to invent another for them of very doubtful applicability?" Rassam's position was that "Syrian" was wrong; the correct form was "Assyrian," but preferred, "Chaldean."[62] Layard always referred to the Nestorian as "Chaldeans" or as "Nestorian Chaldeans" in order to distinguish them from those united with Rome.[63] Only a few years prior to the Assyrian excavations, as already noted, one of the bishops of Urmiyah had emphasized that the Nestorians were as Chaldean as any Catholic renegates.[64]

Prior to World War I, the Anglican mission to the Nestorians gave the Assyrian nomenclature a new impetus. Formally known as "The Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian Mission," it re-enforced, no matter how unintentionally, the linkage between the Nestorians and the ancient Assyrians.[65] "Assyrian Christians," which originally had only meant "The Christians of geographical Assyria," soon became "Christian Assyrians."[66] By the late nineteenth century, a few of the educated and politically conscious among the "Nestorians," especially those who had immigrated to America, began using *Aturaye* [Assyrians] in their writings.[67]

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[62] The correspondence between Rassam and Maclean was carried on through one of the administrators of the Anglican mission in England; for details see Coakley, *The Church of the East and the Church of England*, pp. 147–148.

[63] See his *Nineveh and Its Remains, passim.*

[64] See above, p. 8.

[65] Isabella L. Bishop, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan* (London, 1891), II, 237. See also Aubrey R. Vine, *The Nestorian Churches* (London, 1937), pp. 179–180. Cf. Coakley, p. 366 n. 12.

[66] An appeal by Archbishop Tait published in 1870, was entitled "Appeal on behalf of the Christians of Assyria, commonly called the Nestorians." The text of the appeal spoke of "this request from the Assyrians," and "From that moment 'Assyrian' replaced 'Nestorian' in the formal Anglican vocabulary," writes Coakley, the historian of that mission. *Op. cit*, p. 65. See also Rufus Anderson, *History of the Missions of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to the Oriental Churches* (Boston, 1872), ii, 83, where he points out that in 1840, the American missionaries used the designation "Assyria Mission" in reference to their apostolic work among the Christian sects in Mosul.

[67] Daniel P. Wolk's recent research shows that even the Urmiyah Christians in America, in their own language, continued until after World War I to refer to themselves as *Suryaye.* In his reading of some of their major publications from 1907 to 1920, Wolk found that the first ethno-nationalist organization established in Urmiyah, *Khuyada*—Unity—was a *Suryeta* organization. Chicago's newspaper *Mashkhiddana Suryaya*—Suryaya Herald—first published in 1915—changed to *Mashkhiddana Aturaya* only in 1920, when the nationalist discourse had come of age; the title in

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The assumption that the Nestorians were the descendants of the ancient Assyrians found a great advocate in the Anglican missionary W.A. Wigram, who in his post-World War I books, *The Assyrians and their Neighbours*, and *Our Smallest Ally*, popularized the name Assyrian and familiarized the world with the tragedy that had befallen these "descendants of Shalmaneser."[68] During the interlude between the two world wars the world heard a great deal about these modern Assyrians through newspapers and from the forum of the League of Nations, a subject covered at length below. In their own language, the people gradually began, vocally, to call themselves "Aturaye" (Assyrians) during the inter-war years; until then it was as natural for them to speak of themselves as *Suraye* as it still is for the Syrian Orthodox to call themselves by that name, *Suroyo*. . . .

Because the "Nestorians" had always called themselves *Syrians* (*Suraye*), strenuous efforts were made by the more educated to prove that *Suraye* (Syrians) was simply a truncated form of *Ashuraye* (Assyrian) and that the two terms were synonymous. The initial letter A of "Assyrian," it was explained, was "lost" (*tliqta* in Syriac—it had dropped out); The lost "A" was now retrieved but placed under a cancellation mark, meaning that it was originally there but was not pronounced. Thus Suraya was written "[A]suraya", which, pronounced Ashuraya, also means Assyrian. (Of the two names which mean "Assyrian"—Aturaya [from Aramaic] and Ashuraya [from Hebrew and Akkadian]—it is the former, Aturaya, that is commonly used by the people. The Iraqi government, oddly, in its effort to deny the minority an ancient Assyrian ancestry, refers to these Christians as "Athuriyin" but never "Ashuriyin". The members of the minority resent this usage and prefer to be referred to as "Ashuriyin," the form they themselves do not use.) Heinrichs rightly calls the lost-A hypothesis

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English was *Assyrian American Herald*, most probably because "Syrian" in the United States stood for the more numerous Arab Christians from geographical Syria. See Wolk's "The Emergence of Assyrian Ethnonationalism: The Discourse Against the *Hachaqoge* ('Thieves of the Cross')," paper presented at the Middle East Studies Association Conference (MESA), Chicago, December 6, 1998. For the growth of Assyrian nationalism, quickened during the war years, and the presence of an Assyrian American delegation at the Peace Conference in Paris, see below, pp. 156–157.

[68] Maclean and Browne, p. 6. See also Coakley, p. 147, where he quotes Maclean saying "there is really as far as I know no proof that they ['the Syrian Christians'] had any connection with the Old Assyrians. One of the few Anglicans who did use the term Assyrian was the Archbishop of Canterbury Benson, "but that is a fad of His Grace, as no one else does," wrote one of the missionaries quoted by Coakley. See also Fiey (1965), pp. 149–151.

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very ingenious, facilitating the claim of the nationalists, but points out that in the Armenian language, the names for Syrian and Assyrian, although similar sounding, both have always retained and pronounced the initial A: *Asoric/Asori* for Syria/Syrian and *Asorestan/Asorestants'i* or *Asorestanc'i* for Assyria/Assyrian.[69] Moreover, *even if "Syrian" were derived from "Assyrian," it does not mean that the people and culture of geographical Syria are identical to those of geographical Assyria.*[70]

Prior to the lost-A hypothesis, the learned Mar Tuma Odu wrote that the Greeks had changed *Atur* (meaning Assyria in Aramaic) to *Asur* which gradually became "Sur" and eventually Syria. While this hypothesis sounds plausible, it should be remembered that even in classical Syriac, "Syrian" and "Assyrian" are always differentiated by two distinct terms: "Suryaya" for Syrian and "Aturaya" for Assyrian. In Greek, the name Assyria is a translation of the Hebrew (and Akkadian) *Ashur*, which in the Old Testament connotes only geographical Assyria, without its conquered territories; the biblical name for geographical Syria is Aram, while *Athur* is the Aramaic name for georaphical Assyria.[71]

Herodotus is often erroneously cited by the nationalists as having equated "Assyria" with "Syria," referring to his statement that the

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[69] Heinrichs, pp. 106–7, where he calls the hypothesis "simply naive." Armenian name Asori referred to the people of geographical Syria, the Arameans; it was the name of Arameans wherever they were found. The writer is grateful to the late Dr. Avedis K. Sanjian, Narekatsi Professor of Armenian Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, for confirming my reading of these terms in his letter dated October 10, 1994. Consult also Norayr de Byzance, *Dictionnaire francaisarmenien* (Constantinople, 1884), under "Assyrien," "Syrien," and "Syriaque"; S. Mulkhasyantch, *Armenian Etymological Dictionary* (Erivan, 1944), I 236; G. Avadikian, K. Surmelian, and M. Avkerian, *Dictionary of Armenian Language* (in Armenian) (Venice, 1836), I, 314. See also M. Falla Castlefranchi, "Armenia," *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, v. 1, p. 79; Frederick C. Conybeare, "Armenian Language and Literature," in eleventh edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica*. In late 16th century, Sharaf Khān al-Bidlīsi referred to the Nestorians of Hakkari as "Christian infidels called Ashuri," a borrowing from the Armenian. See al-Bidlisi's *Sharafnameh* (in Persian) (Cairo, n.d.), pp. 130–132.

[70] Heinrichs, pp. 102–103, 104, n. 9. Well known Semitic scholars are of the opinion that "Syrian" and "Assyrian" are of completely different origins even though it remains for future historians to prove the correctness of the theory. See Rosenthal's *Die aramäistische Forschung seit Th. Nöldeke's Veröffenthlichungen* (Leiden, 1939), p. 3, n. 1.

[71] This confusion of terms was heightened in an article entitled "Assyria and Syria: Synonyms," by Richard N. Frye; it appeared in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, v. 51, n. 4 (October, 1992), 281–285. The article was reprinted in the *Journal of the Assyrian Academic Studies*, followed by a critique by this writer entitled "*Assyria and Syria: Synonyms?*" See *JAAS*, v. 11, n. 2 (1997), pp. 30–43. For more on Mar Tuma Odu and his position on this subject, see Heinrichs, p. 103.

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people whom the Greeks call Syrians are called Assyrians by others. Herodotus himself, however, always differentiated between the two terms. Randolph Helm's researches show that Herodotus "conscientiously" and "consistently" distinguished the names Syria and Assyria and used them independently of each other. To Herodotus, writes Helm, "Syrians" were "the inhabitants of the coastal Levant, including North Syria, Phoenicia, and Philistia"; he "*never* [emphasis Helm's] uses the name 'Syria' to apply to Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia is always called 'Assyria' . . . [and its] inhabitants 'Assyrians'." The clear distinction made by Herodotus, comments Helm, was "lost upon later Classical authors, some of whom interpreted [Herodotus'] *Histories VII.*63 as a mandate to refer to Phoenicians, Jews, and any other Levantines as 'Assyrians'."[72]

Some have argued that the physiognomies of the ancient Assyrians and the present-day Nestorians closely resemble each other. Before Wigram advocated his hypothesis that the Nestorians are "Assyrian by blood,"[73] Fletcher had observed that "Those who have studied with care the sculptural representations of the ancient Assyrians and compared them with the modern inhabitants of the plain of Nineveh, can hardly fail to trace the strong features of affinity which exist between the robed monarchs and priests of early days and the Christian peasants of [the plain of Mosul]."[74] Before Fletcher, Asahel Grant did not find it difficult to write convincingly that the Nestorians were the descendants of the "Lost Tribes of Israel"; he noted that "the physiognomy of the Nestorian Christians bears a close resemblance to that of the Jews of the country in which they dwell."[75]

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[72] See Helm's "Herodotus *Histories VII.63* and the Geographical Connotations of the Toponym 'Assyria' in the Archaemenid Period" (paper presented at the 190th meeting of the American Oriental Society, at San Francisco, April 1980). See also his "'Greeks' in the Neo-Assyrian Levant and 'Assyria' in Early Greek Writers" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1980), pp. 27–41; see also Herodotus' *Histories*, I.105 and II.106. The late Arnold J. Toynbee, has also clarified that the *Syrioi* "are the people whom Herodotus includes in his Fifth Taxation District" which includes "the whole of Phoenicia and the so-called Philistine, Syria, together with Cyprus." The *Syrioi*, emphasizes Toynbee, are "not the people of an 'Assyria' which contains Babylon and which is the ninth district in his list." *A Study of History* (1954), vol. vii, p. 654, n. 1. See also George Rawlinson, *The History of Herodotus*, ed. Manuel Komroff (New York, 1956), bk. ii, p. 115. Cf. Odisho, *The Sound System of Modern Assyrian*, *op. cit.*, pp. 8–9.

[73] W.A. Wigram, *The Assyrians and their Neighbours* (London, 1929), p. 167.

[74] Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

[75] Grant, *Nestorians*, p. 223. In his review of Grant's book, Semitic scholar Edward Robinson made a strong argument against Grant's hypothesis in *American Biblical*

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Adducing as peculiar to the ancient Assyrians and the present-day Nestorians features, customs, and practices which are shared by a great number of other Near Easterners, Wigram, or Grant, are indeed trying to prove too much. A number of the peoples of the region resemble both the Jews and the Nestorians in their physiognomy, and not all the Nestorians share the same physical features, as both Fletcher and Wigram have themselves observed.

Yet another "proof" that the Aramaic-speaking Christians are descendants of the ancient Assyrians argues that the language of the two peoples is the same. Layard wrote that the Nestorians spoke "the language of their [Assyrian] ancestors,"[76] an opinion expressed by Layard's Aramaic-speaking assistant, Hormuzd Rassam: that the ancient Assyrians "Always spoke the Aramaic language" and they "still do." We have just seen that the ancient Assyrians did not always speak Aramaic; their mother tongue was Akkadian, the language of the famed cuneiform tablets and monuments that Rassam himself helped excavate.[77]

The Bible Kept Memory of Assyrians Alive

Thanks to the Old Testament, the names *Assyria* and *Assyrian* were well known for centuries, long before the archaeological excavations of the nineteenth century. In the works of the early Eastern Christian writers, notes Fiey, we find all the gamut of references to these

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Repository, 6 (1841), 454–482, and 7 (1842), 26–68. See also Ainsworth, II, 256–271. Consult also *Encyclopedia Judaica* under Israel Joseph Benjamin (also known as Benjamin II), where, independent of Grant and only a few years after him, Benjamin II wrote of an ancient popular tradition that among the Nestorians there were families of Jewish origin. A.J. Maclean has noted that many Jews in Eastern Turkey and Persia have a vernacular closely akin to the spoken Aramaic dialect of the Nestorians. Speaking of the population of the Jilu district of Hakkari, he wrote that the people there "are very different in appearance and character from most of the other Syrians, being of a more Jewish cast." See his *Grammar, op. cit.*, p. xiii. In his monumental history of the Jews in Babylonia, Jacob Neusner writes that he is "much impressed by Asahel Grant's argument in favor of northern Israeli (Adiabenian) origin of the Nestorians." See v. 3, pp. 15–31, 339n. For a study of the Jews of Grant's day in Kurdistan, see W.J. Fischel, "The Jews of Kurdistan a Hundred Years Ago, a traveller's record," *Jewish Social Studies* (1944), 195–226. For details on Jewish origin of Syriac Christianity in general, see below, pp. 36–38.

[76] *Nineveh*, I, 203.

[77] See Rassam "Biblical Nationalities," pp. 178, 371. For details on the aramaization of the Assyrians, see pp. 11–12, 27–29.

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ancients, employing indifferently the words Syrians, Athurians [Assyrians], Chaldeans, and Babylonians, but these writers never identified with these ancients. "I have made indices of my *Christian Assyria*," emphasized Fiey, "and have had to align some 50 pages of proper names of people; there is not a single writer who has an 'Assyrian' name."[78] In early modern times, as noted above, the Roman Catholic Church added to the confusion by coining a number of names for the various Christian communities of the East and their patriarchs; these Roman Catholic titles and names, however, tried to identify the geographical location of the churches and patriarchates of the region and not the ethnic origin of the people involved.[79] In the eighteenth century Assemani used "Assyrian" in reference to the Nestorians but with no implication that they were the descendants of the Assyrians. Assemani, according to Fiey, found a certain Assyrian descendance in all the peoples in the region: Jacobite, Nestorian, Sabaeans, Yezidis, and a great deal among the Kurds.[80] Also in the 18th century, the British historian Edward Gibbon, aware of this confusion of names, wrote that the Nestorians, "Under the name of Chaldeans or Assyrians, are confounded with the most learned or the most powerful nation of Eastern antiquity."[81]

Until the nineteenth century A.D., the *only common folk* who had some knowledge of the ancient Assyrians—their history, empire, names of some of their kings, etc.—were the Jews, and through them, the Christians. These were the only people who religiously read the Bible or listened to its stories and histories being read or narrated. For over 2000 years, the Jewish people had been reading or hearing about the Assyrians before the Assyrian cuneiform tablets were discovered and deciphered in the 19th century A.D. Assyrian monuments of stone and clay lay buried under the dust and debris of two millenniums, written in a language long forgotten before they were deciphered during the 1850s.[82] Biblical texts during those same long centuries, were carefully copied on parchment, leather or papyrus, and reverently transmitted by hand from one generation to the next,

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[78] See his "'Assyriens' ou 'Araméens'?", p. 146.

[79] *Ibid.* See also Coakley, *The Church of the East*, pp. 65–66.

[80] See Fiey (1965), p. 148, n. 33, where the expression in French is "beaucoup parmi les Kurdes." See also Assemani, III, ii, 177.

[81] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J.B. Bury (London, 1898), v. 150.

[82] See above, pp. 15ff.

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their stories read or listened to throughout those ages. The Christians, too, were for centuries tuned to the biblical accounts—for over a thousand years before the Assyrian cuneiform documents were rediscovered.[83]

Because of the centrality of the subject in Jewish history, the Bible dwelt at some length on Assyrian and Babylonian kings, religion, geography and history. The destruction of the kingdom of Israel by Assyria, and of Judah by Babylon, had resulted in a national trauma for the Jews. Jewish history, fatally entangled with that of the imperial powers of Mesopotamia, was mourned and reflected upon in the various prophetic works; it was always remembered, keeping at the same time, the memory of ancient Assyria alive.[84]

It is important to bear in mind that throughout the centuries, the cultural and religious life of the people who embraced Christianity, in both the West and East, was reshaped by the Bible's prayers, proverbs, lamentations, and poetry. Biblical stories, histories, and legends became favorite folktales, the source of their folklore and myths for centuries to come. The Hebrew Bible that the Christians inherited gave them not only a sacred book but also a vision of the past and of its peoples; it provided them with a new and distinct identity.[85]

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[83] For the text of the Book of Isaiah—a major Biblical source on the ancient Assyrians—"preserved complete" in many Syriac manuscripts from the fifth century A.D. on—see *Isaiah*, Part III, fascicule 1 of *The Old Testament According to the Peshitta Version*, ed. by the Peshitta Institute of Leiden, prepared by Sebastian Brock (Leiden 1987), pp. viii, x, xi, xiii, xx, xxii. See also "Text History and Text Division in Peshitta Isaiah," in P.B. Dirksen and N.J. Mulder, *The Peshitta: Its Early Text and History*, (Leiden, 1988). The books of the Peshitta Old Testament were translated at different times by Jews for Aramaic-speaking Jews of Mesopotamia; they were adopted as their own by the early Aramaic-speaking Christians, many of them formerly Jews. The origins of the various components of the Peshitta Old Testament, writes Sebastian Brock, "remain extremely obscure" (1992, p. 225). See also Han J.W. Drijvers, "Early Syriac Christianity: Some Recent Publications," in *Vigilae Christianae*, 50, no. 2, (1996), 174.

[84] The historical books of the Hebrew Bible recorded the danger to Israel that emanated from Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt. The imperial expansion of the two Mesopotamian empires westward toward Palestine and Egypt had naturally attracted the attention of the prophets. Assyrian power and cultural influence were at their height in the time of the prophet Isaiah, the prophet who showed the keenest interest in the affairs of the Assyrians. The various chapters of the book of Isaiah deal with a number of crises and alliances in the region, including negotiations in 727 between Assyria and Egypt, the Assyrian suppression of a Babylonian rebellion in 731–729, and the Assyrian King Sargon's new anti-Egyptian policy. Consult John R. Bartlett, *The Bible, Faith and Evidence, a critical enquiry into the nature of biblical history* (London, 1990), pp. 61, 103,-6, 115; Saggs (1969), p. 1. See also Is. 5:26–30.

[85] See also below, pp. 35ff.

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In time, the only past that these Christians knew came from the Old Testament—what Fergus Millar calls "the historical inheritance of the Bible."[86]

Jesus and the Ancient Assyrians

While the Assyrians are associated in the Old Testament with war and violence, they are also remembered there as a special people. One of the books of the Old Testament, albeit a brief one, is wholly devoted to the Assyrians: the story of Jonah, one of the great favorites of the Bible. God bids Jonah, we read, to journey on a special mission to the capital of the Assyrians, Nineveh. Through the mouth of Jonah, God warned the Assyrians that should they not give up their wicked ways, "in forty days Nineveh will be overthrown." The Ninevites "took heart this warning from God; they declared a public fast, and high and low alike put on sackcloth." God then "relented and did not inflict on them the punishment he had threatened."[87]

During the Christian period, over seven hundred years after the fall of Nineveh and of the Assyrian empire, the story of Jonah became one of the favorites of the church fathers, its theme being the divine pardon for repentant sinners—that God's universal love and mercy extend to all men, even to the Assyrians. Jesus, a Jew well familiar with the Hebrew Bible, referred to the ancient story; he used the Assyrians of Nineveh as a model for the Jews of his day, whom he reproached for their unwillingness to repent. "The men of Nineveh," Jesus told his listeners, "will appear in court when this generation [of Jews] is on trial, and ensure its condemnation, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and what is here is greater than Jonah."[88]

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[86] *Rome and the East 31 B.C.-A.D. 337* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 227, 487–88. See also his article, "Empire, Community and Culture in the Roman Near East: Greeks, Syrians, Jews and Arabs," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 38 (1987), 143–164.

[87] See Jonah 1:17; 3:4–10. Biblical scholars are of the opinion that the book of Jonah may have originated in the 5th century B.C., long after the fall of Nineveh. The venomous oracles of Nahum, who probably lived and preached about the time of Nineveh's fall, depict the Assyrian capital as a harlot and relate its punishment to the sins of Assyrians. See Nahum, 3:4–7. Besides the book of Jonah, there are almost 120 references on the Assyrians, in thirteen other books of the Bible.

[88] Matthew 12:40–41. See also Luke 11:29–30: "For just as Jonah was a sign for the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be a sign for the present age." For interpretations of the Jonah story in Western art and literature, see James Linburg, *Jonah: A Commentary* (Louisville, 1993).

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Because of these New Testament references, the story of Jonah and its universalist message had a special meaning for the Christians and are referred to throughout the patristic literature. To Christians everywhere, the Assyrians of Nineveh became a model during the Lenten penance. The Roman Catholics read the third chapter of Jonah on Wednesday of the first week of Lent. In the Greek Orthodox liturgy, the entire book of Jonah is read during Lent, while Anglicans and Lutherans read portions of it. During the afternoon service on Yom Kippur, the Jews read the book of Jonah because of its emphasis on God's forgiveness after genuine repentance.[89]

The Eastern Christians, whether Armenians, Copts, Ethiopians, Jacobites, or Nestorians, observe a pre-Lenten fast remembering the message of Jonah and what Jesus said of the Ninevites. Locally, both Christians and Jews commemorated the event: Christians built a church where Jonah "had preached." The Jews of Mosul had the synagogue of Obadiah which, according to tradition, "Jonah built."[90] Emhardt and Lamsa in the 1920s, and the Assyrian nationalists after them, have misinterpreted the Rogation of the Ninevites (Baʿūta d'Ninwāye) as a unique fast among the Nestorians, observed as a thanksgiving "for the salvation of their forefathers," entirely missing the theological and historical significance of the Biblical story of Jonah in both Jewish and Christian tradition.[91]

Eager to establish a link between themselves and the ancient Assyrians, the nationalists conclude that such a link is confirmed whenever they find a reference to the word "Assyrians" during the early Christian period; to them it proves that their Christian ancestors always "remembered" their Assyrian forefathers. Nationalist writers often refer to Tatian's statement that he was "born in the land of the Assyrians," and note that the *Acts of Mar Qardagh* trace the martyr's ancestry to ancient Assyrian kings.[92]

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[89] See "Jonah" in *Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (1997).

[90] Influenced by both Jewish and Christian traditions, Muslims believe that prophet Jonah is buried in Mosul, where a mosque is dedicated to him.

[91] William C. Emhardt and George M. Lamsa, *The Oldest Christian People* (New York, 1926; reprinted by AMS Press in 1970), p. 22. According to the authors, "Abraham was Assyrian," and Aramaic "is not only the language which Christ spoke, but the language also, we are told, which God spoke to Adam."

[92] Tatian not only did not claim to be an Assyrian, but scholars point out that he was not even born in lands to the east of the Euphrates. Tatian (Greek Tatianos), writes Millar, no more came from geographical Assyria than did that other "Assyrian" with a Latin name, Lucian (Greek Lucianos) of Samosata. Millar explains simply that the terms Assyria and Assyrians were common terms then for geographical

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It is not surprising that "in the land of the Assyrians" one encounters an occasional legend that traces the ancestry of an individual or group to an ancient hero. This writer has heard Persians on the streets of Kermanshah begging and claiming that they were the lineal descendants of Imam Husayn—grandson of the Prophet Muhammad—who lived over 1,300 years before them. Michael G. Morony speaks of villagers of Aramean descent who, assimilated with the Persians, claimed to be of Royal Persian descent—"from Kisra, son of Qubadh."[93] The story of Mar Qardagh, himself a semi-legendary figure, is such a legend; it traces the ancestry of his father to the family of Nimrud and that of his mother to the family of Sennacherib (705–681 B.C.), a genealogy that harks back over a thousand years.[94]

Assyrian Survival After the Fall

Modern Assyrian writers usually cite a statement that assyriologist Sidney Smith allegedly made early in the twentieth century—namely,

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Syria and its inhabitants. See his *Rome and the East*, pp. 227, 454–455, 460. Consult also Asmussen, *op. cit.*, p. 927; *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (New York, 1992), under "Tatian"; Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 197, n. 163.

[93] See his *Iraq After the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, 1984), p. 173.

[94] The *Acts* also tell us that young Qardagh, before his conversion to Christianity, was a Zoroastrian, his father bearing the Persian name of Gushnavi. When Qardagh became a Christian he was serving Shapur II as a military governor in geographical Assyria. After his conversion he, like other martyrs, performed miracles; when faced with Satan in human form, he cursed him and made the sign of the cross, turning satan into a snake. See Mar Aprim, *The Nestorian Fathers*, *op. cit.* See also *Hagarism*, p. 190, n. 71, where in accordance with their methodology, authors Crone and Cook accept Qardagh's descendance from Assyrian kings as a believed fact by his contemporaries, making *Hagarism* a favorite source book of the modern Assyrian writers. In a letter to the author, dated June 11, 1997, Patricia Crone wrote that she and Cook "do not argue that the Nestorians of pre-Islamic Iraq saw themselves as Assyrians or that this is what they called themselves. They called themselves Suryane, which had no greater connotation of Assyrian in their usage than it did in anyone else's . . . We take it for granted that they got the modern Assyrian label from the West and proceeded to reinvent themselves . . . Of course the Nestorians were Arameans." In their prefatory remarks Crone and Cook, who warn the non-specialist not to expect a "guided tour" but a pioneering expedition through some very rough country, also anticipate "the raised eyebrows" of the specialists. For reviews of *Hagarism*, see Oleg Grabar, in *Speculum* 53, (October, 1978), pp. 795–799; Michael G. Morony, in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 41, no. 2, (1982), 159; Joseph Van Ess, "The Making of Islam," in *Times Literary Supplement* (September 8, 1978), pp. 997–998. For nationalist references to, and misinterpretation of, *Hagarism*, see Odisho Bet Ashur (pen name), "The Continuity of Assyrian History," *Nineveh*, v. 17, no. 3 (1994), pp. 16–17, notes 19, 20, 24; Odisho, *Sound Systems*, pp. 10, 15–16.

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that the ancient Assyrians disappeared "immediately" and "vanished" after the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C. To "disprove" Smith, they cite another assyriologist, W.W. Tarn, who noted that for centuries after the fall of their empire, Assyrian "survivors" perpetuated old Assyrian names at various places on the site of ancient Ashur. Edward Y. Odisho refers to "a few" historians who "talk about the continuation of the (Assyrian) [sic] identity" until the establishment of Christianity in geographical Assyria, some eight centuries after the fall of the Assyrian empire.[95] What do these few historians and assyriologists really "talk about"?

Excavations in northern Iraq, according to Sidney Smith, "have, it is true, shown that poverty-stricken communities perpetuated the old Assyrian names . . . but the essential truth," he concludes, "remains the same": the Assyrians were "unduly devoted to practices which can only end in racial suicide."[96] W.W. Tarn notes that under the Parthians in the early 3rd century A.D. "a little body of people" worshipped the god Ashur; he describes theirs as "a pathetic survival."[97] More recently, assyriologist Joan Oates, in a section entitled "Assyria after the fall," points out that on the site of old Ashur, where "a large Parthian city" was excavated, the influence of Assyrian tradition and symbolism can sometimes be seen "in architecture and art."[98] Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, in their *Hagarism* note that under the Parthians "The temple of Ashur was restored, the city was rebuilt, and an Assyrian successor state returned in the shape of the client kingdom of Adiabene," adding that the region had an Assyrian "self-identification" and speak of the survival of "a native aristocracy."[99]

Odisho's reading of *Hagarism* leads him to the conclusion that as late as the Parthian period—over 800 years after the fall of the

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[95] Odisho, *ibid.*, p. 17.

[96] "Asurbanipal and the Fall of Assyria," *The Cambridge Ancient History, The Assyrian Empire*, v. 3 (1954 reprint), pp. 130–131. See also above, pp. 11f.

[97] See "Parthia," in *ibid.*, *The Roman Republic 133–44 B.C.* v. 9, (1962), pp. 597–598. Cf. Odisho Bet Ashur, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

[98] *The Cambridge Ancient History. The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires*, v. 3, pt. 2 (2nd ed., 1991), pp. 189–193.

[99] During the Parthian period, geographical Assyria, the lands situated between the Greater and Lesser Zab rivers to the east of the Tigris river, were known to Western historians as Adiabene, a corruption of Hadyab in Aramaic. The Parthian name for Assyria was Norshirakan, while Northern Mesopotamia was known as Arabistan. See A.D.H. Bivar, "The Political History of Iran under the Arsacids," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, v. 3, pt. 1 (1983), p. 89. Consult also Wilhelm Eilers, "Iran and Mesopotamia," in *ibid.*, p. 496. For the misinterpretation of *Hagarism* by modern Assyrian writers, see above, p. 27n.94.

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Assyrian empire—"there survived a strong native (Assyrian) [sic] aristocracy peculiar to itself and very conscious of its past and proud of it."[100] To reinforce this hypothesis, Odisho cites historian of ancient Iraq Georges Roux, who notes that during the Parthian period geographical "Assyria was literally resurrected," and that several of its cities were "inhabited again, and Assur, rebuilt anew, became at least as large a city as it had been in the heyday of the Assyrian empire."[101] According to Odisho, the resurrection and rebuilding of Assyria were done by the "strong native Assyrian aristocracy" that he believes flourished under the benign rule of the Parthians. A more careful reading of Roux, however, would have shown that there is no mention of any Assyrian involvement in the reoccupation and reconstruction of the "towns and villages which had been lying in ruins for hundreds of years." In the very next sentence following the above quotation, left out by Odisho, Roux writes that it must be emphasized that "the revived settlements had very little in common with their Assyrian or Babylonian precursors"; that the old Sumero-Akkadian civilization, which was "perpetuated by a few priests in a few temples," was an "ossified" civilization that simply could not withstand the profound ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural changes that were introduced by successive waves of invaders in northern Mesopotamia—Persians, Greeks, Arameans, pre-Islamic Arabs—"who could be neither kept at bay nor assimilated." This massive influx of foreign peoples and ideas "had submerged what was left of the Sumero-Akkadian civilization." Speaking specifically of the ancient Assyrians, Roux explains in what sense the ancient Assyrians "disappeared": they were a people who had forgotten their Akkadian mother tongue, and a "nation which forgets its language forgets its past and soon loses its identity."[102]

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[100] *Loc. cit.*, p. 17

[101] *Ibid.*, p. 9 n. 5.

[102] Cf. Roux, *ibid.* (1964 edition), pp. 352, 354–355, and pp. 419–420, 423–42 (1992 edition). One of the tenets of the modern Assyrian writers is that it was the Arameans who were assyrianized and their identity changed. In a recent article, one of them wrote that some of the modern Assyrians "rightly point out that even the idea of the ancient Assyrians adopting the language of a wandering tribal group is questionable; why would a civilization as great as Assyria adopt the language of essentially desert nomads." See Odisho Bet Ashur [pen-name], "The Continuity of Assyrian History," *Nineveh*, 17, no. 3 (1994), p. 12. Lately, Assyrian nationalists have found a supporter in the Finnish scholar Simo Parpola. In a lecture before the annual Assyrian convention on September 4, 1999, Parpola told his audience that the Assyrian empire had, in the final analysis, "never been destroyed at all but had just changed ownership: first to Babylonian and Median dynasties, and then to a

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The Middle Eastern "Millets"

Aramaic language molded widely differing ethnic, social, and political elements into a uniform and integrated culture. Just as Arabic language later amalgamated various ethnic groups, creating the Arabs, without much regard to their Arabian physical origin, so did Aramaic mold peoples of different identities into Arameans ("Syrians"). The ancient Assyrians did not "vanish" when they were vanquished in late 7th century B.C., nor did everyone of them immediately "perish."[103] They merely "merged with the mass of Near Eastern Aramaeans," just as other peoples before and after them, were similarly assimilated, like the Sumerians, Babylonians, Hittites, Hurrians, and others.[104] About 800 years after the fall of Nineveh, a common religion (Christianity), together with a common language (Aramaic) unified the peoples of this region, just as Islam and the Arabic tongue would arabize and muslimize most of the Arameans a few centuries later, causing *them* to "disappear."

Christianity began in an Aramaic environment; Jesus preached his message in an Aramaic dialect. Among the converts to the new faith were Jews and Gentiles of all ethnic backgrounds. The Church and

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Persian one." The Assyrian Empire "continued to live on despite the fact that the Assyrians themselves were no longer in control of it." According to Parpola, one of whose research interests is to trace the roots of Hebrew monotheism and Greek philosophy to Mesopotamian and Assyrian origins, the Christian religion is essentially a religion of the ancient Assyrians; "many of the teachings of the early Church," he said, "were consonant with the tenets of Assyrians imperial religion. In fact, it can be argued that many features and dogmas of early Christiantiy were based on practices and ideas already central to Assyrian imperial ideology and religion." Parpola's lecture, reproduced on the internet on September 17, 1999, is reportedly to be published in the *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies*, vol. xiii, no. 2, 1999. See also his article "The Assyrian Tree of Life—tracing the origins of Jewish monotheism and Greek philosophy," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 52, no. 3 (July, 1993), pp. 161–208. For Hebrew cultural borrowings from Mesopotamia, see above, pp. 16–17 n. 58.

[103] For a recent study by an assyriologist on the erroneous and naive assumption that Nineveh was "utterly destroyed," "vanished," or "annihilated" in 612, see Stephanie Dalley's "Nineveh after 612 B.C." in *Altorientalische Forschungen*, v. 20, n. 1 (1993), pp. 134–147. Dalley finds evidence that other peoples, representing those who ruled the region after 612, seem to have occupied parts of the city. She concludes that Nineveh "should long have been abandoned" by the 4th century B.C., but Assyrian cuneiform "died out completely after the fall of Nineveh." The author is indebted to Francis Sarguis for bringing the Dalley article to his attention.

[104] See I.M. Diakonoff, "Media," in *Cambridge History of Iran, The Median and Achaemenian Period*, v. 2, p. 124; Fiey (1965), p. 159; Nicholas Postgate, *The First Empires* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 133–134; Wilhelm Eilers, "Iran and Mesopotamia," in *Cambridge History of Iran*, 3(i), 497, where Mesopotamia is described as lying open to all sides, becoming "a melting pot of races and cultures."

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the new religion served as a melting pot; as members of a new dispensation, the converts tended to lay aside former distinctions and prejudices and became in the character of Christians one homogeneous people devoted to the Lord, not unlike the Islamic *umma* of the 7th century A.D.[105] Writing in the third century, Bardesanes, the eminent Edessan known as founder of Syriac literature, did not feel himself to be the leader of a sect but rather to belong unquestionably to the universal Church. "What shall we say about ourselves, the 'new race' of Christians whom Christ has caused to be raised in all countries as a consequence of his own coming? We are all Christians by the one name of Christ wherever we may be found." He then proceeds to speak of the brethren in Gaul, Parthia, India, Persia, and Mesopotamia without making any distinction.[106]

But the Christian community could not for long think of itself as a new nation. Various factors—geographical, political, sociological—were bound to give rise to a whole new set of ideas which were very different from the aims of the accepted Church tradition. In the case of the Church of the East the hostility between the Roman and Persian empires made it necessary for these Aramaic-speaking Christians of Persia to build up their own independent ecclesiastical organization. Eventually, the church in Persia became a sort of national church over which the Bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon wielded unlimited power.[107]

The various sections of the dissected Christian community in the Middle East eventually developed into "secondary ecological and kinship units." They became *millets*, a term which, depending on the group's geography, history and size, could be translated into sects, communities, minorities, or nationalities—groups of people who owed allegiance to one another and to their religious leaders by the ties of faith and language. A member who adopted another creed was regarded as a renegade.[108] The people who today call themselves

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[105] See the *Epistle to Diognetus*, author unknown, written about the end of the second century and translated by Henry G. Meecham (Manchester, 1949), p. 81; see also Phil. 3:20.

[106] Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Kirsopp Lake (London, 1926–1932), I, iv, 2; Adolf von Harnack, *The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, trans. and ed. James Moffatt (New York, 1904), pp. 307ff. See also Fergus Millar, "Empire, Community and Culture," *op. cit.*, pp. 143 seq. For the beginnings of the Christian church in Mesopotamia, see below, pp. 35ff.

[107] For details on the beginnings of the church in Persia, see chapter 2.

[108] W.A. Wigram, *An Introduction to the History of the Assyrian Church* (London, 1910), pp. 83–84.

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Assyrians are, strictly speaking, members of a cultural and religious group, molded together into a minority by ties of a common language and, until the nineteenth century, a common church membership which, until the birth of the modern nation-state in the Middle East, was the strongest tie among people. The lineal origin of the community, like that of most Middle Eastern nationalities—and nationalities the world over—is hidden in the mists of history. The religious and linguistic minority under discussion is naturally a mixture of ethnicities, mainly Aramean, but also Persian,[109] Kurdish,[110] Arab,[111] and Jewish,[112] just as present-day Arabs are the result of a similar merging of a variety of nationalities. But just as it was the speakers of Arabian language who gave most of the converts to Islam in the Middle East and North Africa the name "Arab," so the Arameans gave the various converts to Christianity their mother tongue, and for the next 1,800 years, bequeathed to them the language of their literature and liturgy as well as the very name by which they have for centuries called themselves—*Suraye, Suryaye.*[113]

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[109] Alfonso Mingana, "The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East," *The John Rylands Library Bulletin*, 9 (1925), 300; *Patrologia orientalis*, v. 328–329; F. Dvornik, *National Churches and the Church Universal* (Exeter, n.d.), p. 8. See also C.E. Bosworth, "Iran and the Arabs before Islam," in *Cambridge History of Iran*, 3(i), pp. 594, 598, and *passim*.

[110] Mark Sykes, "The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire," Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland Journal, 38 (1908), 453, 473–474; J. Labourt, "Nestorians," Encyclopedia of Islam, III, 903. See also al-Ansari, *Kitab Nakhbat al-Dahr*, ed. M.A.F. Mehren (St. Petersburg, 1866), p. 255; Binyamin Arsanis, *Su'rana*, pp. 35, 98–101. For an account on Kurds in ancient times, see V. Minorsky, "Kurds and Kurdistan" in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, revised edition. See also above, p. 23.

[111] See below, pp. 38–39.

[112] See pp. 21–22, 36–37.

[113] As noted above, the Syrian Orthodox Christians still refer to themselves as Syrians (*Suroyo* or *Suryoyo*). Aramean ancestry, they claim, is not only ancient and one to be proud of, but their linkage with their forebears is one that no one can question or undermine. While they rightly consider the terms "Arameans" and "Syrians" synonymous, the name "Syrian" (Suryān in Arabic Syriacs in English) is preferred because of its continuous use since the "very dawn of Christianity." See Mar Ignatius Ephrem I, *The Syrian Church of Antioch, Its Name and History* (Hackensack, New Jersey, n.d.), pp. 1–29, where in detail he shows that the terms "Syrians" and "Arameans" are synonyms. For the recent "Assyrian-or-Aramean" controversy within the Syrian Orthodox minority, see Helga Anschütz, *Die syrischen Christen vom Tur 'Abdin* (Würzburg, 1984), pp. 164 seq.; Heinrichs, pp. 99–101, 103, 111; Heidi Armbruster, "We speak the Language that was spoken by Jesus': Syrian Christian Migrants in Vienna," paper presented at the Middle East Studies Association's 30th Annual meeting, November 21–24, 1996, Providence, Rhode Island, pp. 20–21. See also above, pp. 9f.

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CHAPTER TWO

EARLY BEGINNINGS

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Nestorian Christians were geographically distributed over three contiguous territories: one in Qajar Persia, on the plains of Salmas and Urmiyah in the province of Azerbayjan; the other two, within the Ottoman Empire: on the rugged mountainous terrain of Hakkari in southeastern Anatolia, and in parts of southern Kurdistan, including the plain north of Mosul in present-day Iraq.[1]

The Nestorian Christians of Hakkari were most probably driven there from their homes in central and northern Mesopotamia and geographical Syria by successive wars and persecutions, the most epochal of which were perhaps those suffered during the Taimur Lang (Tamerlane) period at the close of the 14th century. While large numbers may have sought refuge in the isolated mountains of Kurdistan at that time, there are monuments and architectural records that argue the residence of Christians there before those migrations. The oldest Christian churches in these parts of Anatolia date from pre-Islamic days.[2] Some of the Aramaic-speaking Christians native to this region were probably Kurds who had embraced the Christian faith.

It is not clear when the "East Syrians" (Nestorians) settled the plains of Urmiyah. The town of Urmiyah is not mentioned in the oldest lists of the dioceses of the Church of the East, although Azerbayjan is noted as early as the fifth century.[3] Assemani wrote of the presence of a Nestorian bishop in Urmiyah in 1111.[4] The first

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[1] See map, p. 34.

[2] Bell, Gertrude. "Churches and Monasteries in the Tur Abdin," in Max van Berchem, *Amida: Matériaux pour l'épigraphie et l'histoire musulmanes du Diyarbekr* (Heidelberg, 1910), pp. 224–262.

[3] Chabot, *Synodicon*, pp. 276, 307, 345, 366, 368, 479, 619. See also ibn al-'Ibri, *Chronography*, I, 450.

[4] Joseph S. Assemani. *Bibliotheca Orientalis*. II, 449; Theodor Nöldeke, *Grammatik der neusyrischen Sprache am Urmia-See und in Kurdistan* (Leipzig, 1868), p. xxii; I. Silbernagl, *Verfassung und gegenwärtiger Bestand sämtlicher Kirchen des Orients* (Regensburg, 1904), p. 267.

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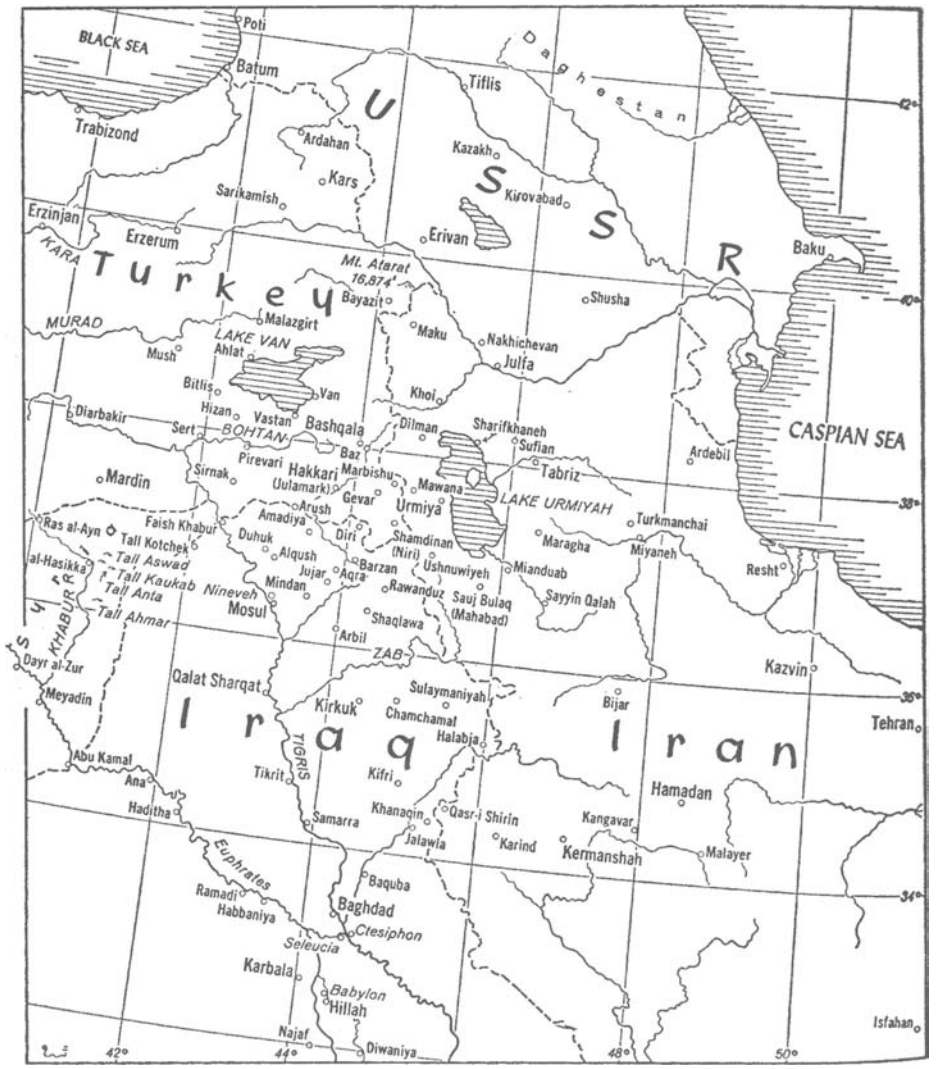

Nestorian Homegrounds

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American missionary to the Nestorians, Justin Perkins,[5] recorded that a Syriac manuscript, found in the town of Urmiyah in a mosque that originally was a church, was purported to have been written in that church in the eleventh century.[6]

The early expansion of Christianity in Mesopotamia and Persia is still a debated historical issue. The details of Christian expansion there, writes a leading scholar in the field, "are completely unknown."[7] The Eastern Christians themselves claim a tradition that traces their lineage to St. Thomas. On his way to India, they say, St. Thomas stopped by Lake Urmiyah and converted the people there. Other traditions credit the introduction of Christianity in lands to the east of the Euphrates to the apostle Thaddaeus (Addai), while a more romantic legend attributes these early origins to the Three Wise Men of the East who followed the Star to Bethlehem. The beginnings of Christianity here may well be connected with what we read in the New Testament (Acts 2:9) that on the Day of Pentecost, there were at Jerusalem "Parthians and Medes, and Elamites, and inhabitants of Mesopotamia."[8]

What has been recorded by Syrian chroniclers of the Middle Ages is almost wholly legendary. Internal evidence shows that the Addai legend, later expanded by the author of the *Teachings of Addai*, also known as *The Doctrine of Addai*, can hardly be earlier than the fifth century. The story that Jesus himself sent Addai his disciple to King Abgar,[9] whom he converted and baptized, is a pious fabrication that intends to trace the origins of the Edessan church directly to the apostles. The fact that the legend is widely held in the Eastern Church, writes Sebastian Brock, is hardly justification for giving it credence.[10]

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[5] For more on Perkins, see below, pp. 67ff.

[6] *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

[7] Hans Drijvers, "Syrian Christianity and Judaism," in *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, edited by J. Lieu, J. North and T. Rajak (London, 1994), p. 127.

[8] For more on Christianity in northern Mesopotamia, see above, pp. 30–31.

[9] For the Arab origin of the Abgar dynasty, see Fergus Millar, "Empire, Community and Culture in the Roman Near East: Greeks, Syrians, Jews and Arabs," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 38 (1987), 151–152. See also Vööbus, *Asceticism*, I, 3. Vööbus speaks of inherited fabrication and fiction which have given us "an entirely wrong impression of the beginnings of Christianity in Mesopotamia."

[10] See *Journal of Theological Studies*, no. 22 (October, 1971), p. 608, where Brock reviews J.B. Segal's *Edessa*, and S. Brock's, "Eusebius and Syriac Christianity," in Harold W. Attbridge and Gohei Hata, *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*. London, 1992, p. 227. See also Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom, A Study in*

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Evidence shows that Christianity reached these distant regions early. The majority of the very early converts to Christianity in lands to the east of the Euphrates were Jews.[11] In and around the site of ancient Nineveh was a Jewish community that had been there several centuries before the advent of Christianity. A testimony to Jewish influence in Adiabene, the heartland of ancient Assyria, is the conversion during the first half of the 1st century A.D. of the inhabitants of the region, together with their king, to Judaism. By the end of the second century, Judaism was well established there; we read that many of the nobles of Adiabene had been hostile to the conversion; they fought it by turning for help to an "Arab king Abias," but were defeated.[12]

Many of the flourishing Jewish community in northern Mesopotamia eventually became Christians, adopting and preserving doctrines that were Jewish.[13] The first bishops of Arbella, capital of Adiabene, all had Hebrew names from the Old Testament. The early strength of the Jewish Christians, writes Asmussen, was concentrated in the district of Adiabene, even more so than in Edessa.[14] Recent work done in the fields of gnosis, heterodox Judaism and Judaeo-Christianity has shown a close association between some features of the Syriac church and "a thoroughly Jewish form" of Christianity. Robert Murray is of the opinion that "It hardly remains credible that Syriac Christianity as we know it in the fourth century should have developed from a direct apostolic mission from Jerusalem to Edessa"; he speaks of "Unofficial evangelization and the spontaneous spread of

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Early Syriac Tradition (Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 8–9, where the Edessene story, writes Murray, was borrowed by fourth-century Christians from their Jewish neighbors. Consult also R. Lavenant, "Edessa," and F. Relliet, "Persia," both in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (Oxford, 1992). Robert W. Thomson points out that the Armenians, who were familiar with the story of the conversion of Edessa, also adopted Addai as the first missionary in Armenia, while Abgar came to be an Armenian monarch. See Thomson's "The formation of the Armenian Literary Tradition," in Garsoïan, *et al., East of Byzantium*, pp. 142–143.

[11] During both the Parthian and Sasanian eras, Judaism had spread among the native Aramean inhabitants of Mesopotamia, introducing them to the law and faith of the Hebrew Bible; the Jews there were the oldest organized religious community. Morony, p. 306.

[12] See Segal, *Edessa*, pp. 66–69; and Isaiah Gafni, "Adiabene," and Abraham Ben-Yaacob, "Kurdistan," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1971).

[13] Segal, *Proceedings*, pp. 121 seq.

[14] J.P. Asmussen, "Christians in Iran," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, (Cambridge, 1983), vol. 3 (2), pp. 924–927.

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Judaeo-Christian groups," who combined Jewish observance with the Christian faith.[15]

The American physician-missionary Asahel Grant, who served among the Nestorians during the first half of the nineteenth century[16] and wrote a book to prove that the Nestorians were none other than the descendants of the deported "Lost Tribes" of Israel, has observed that the Jews of Adiabene were in a state peculiarly favorable to the reception of the Gospel. It was certainly not difficult for the Jews of northern Mesopotamia to combine a respect for Jesus with strong Jewish traditions and customs. Michael Weitzman speaks of the "Judaism out of which the Syriac Church grew"; he writes that the unorthodox Judaism of the Diaspora "accepted the inference that the Messiah had already come and that the historical Israel had been rejected.[17] Even where Jews did not convert to Christianity, they collaborated with Christians as allies in their struggle against the heathen. It is almost a truism, writes Segal, "that the advance of Christianity was most rapid in those places where Jews lived firmly established and secure."[18] Christianity in the Persian Empire, confirms Jacob Neusner, was chiefly the creation of Jews working along with other Aramaic-speaking peoples.[19]

As it expanded, the new faith was embraced by the gentiles among the multitude of ethnic groups that made up the population

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[15] Murray, pp. 8–17. See also Jacob Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism* (Leiden, 1971), pp. 1 seq. and *Idem. A History of the Jews in Babylonia* (Leiden, 1965), vol. I, pp. 58–70. Refer also to J.B. Segal, *Edessa, "the blessed city"* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 41–43, where he notes the tradition mentioned in the *Doctrine of Addai* that the Jews who, conversant with the Law and the Prophets, "were also persuaded and became disciples and made the Christian confession." Cf. Han J.W. Drijvers, "Early Syriac Christianity: Some Recent Publications," in *Vigilliae Christianae*, 50 (1996), pp. 167 seq., where he argues—against a widespread opinion—that the east Syrian and northern Mesopotamian regions were not so isolated and untouched by Greco-Roman civilization as is often assumed, emphasizing that there was little Jewish influence on Christianity. For a critique of Drijver's position, see Luise Abramowski in *Oriens christianus*, lxviii (1984), and her review of Drijver's book *East of Antioch—Studies in Early Syriac Christianity* (1984), in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 38, (April, 1987), pp. 218–219.

[16] See below, p. 67ff.

[17] "From Judaism to Christianity: the Syriac Version of the Hebrew Bible," in Lieu, *et al., op. cit.*, pp. 167–168. See also Asahel Grant, *The Nestorians; or, the Lost Tribes* (New York, 1845), pp. 211–12. For an evaluation of Grant's book by Neusner, see his *History*, v. 3, pp. 15, 31n, 339n.

[18] Edessa, p. 101; *idem., Proceedings*, pp. 121 seq.

[19] See his *Aphrahat*, pp. 1 seq.; *idem., History*, v. 4, pp. 56–61. Consult also Murray, pp. 8–17.

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of northern Mesopotamia. The Church fathers and theologians eventually took "the symbols and images" of the Bible and wove them in distinctive fashions into their own poems, hymns, and sermons.[20] Christians were also joined in large numbers by co-religionists from Byzantine territory; they were brought as captives or came as refugees escaping religious persecution. Until Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in the fourth century, all Christians were persecuted; those of them who escaped to Persian territory were not—at the time—considered politically suspect by the authorities there. The Parthian period was especially characterized by peace and quiet for both Jews and Christians; this gave Christianity the opportunity to consolidate and expand.

The Church's fortunes, of course, fluctuated depending on its status in the Byzantine empire and on its relations with Persia, especially after the Sasanians had succeeded the Parthians. When the Byzantine empire became Christian with the conversion of Constantine, the Persians began to question the loyalty of their Christian subjects. More nationalistic than their predecessors, the Sasanians looked upon themselves as upholders of Zoroastrianism, the religion and cult of ancient Iran. Relations between Byzantium and Persia deteriorated when Christianity became the state religion of Persia's enemy. Shah Shapur II (309–379), a contemporary of Constantine, reportedly "detested the Christians" of his own realm. He initiated against them persecutions that lasted thirty-nine years; the horrors of these years are recorded in the numerous Syriac "Acts of the Martyrs".[21]

In addition to political and religious refugees, the rivers and fertile valleys of northern Mesopotamia had throughout the ages attracted peoples of varied races and cultures from the less hospitable lands that surrounded them, creating the age-old problem between the desert and the sown. This insecure environment gave rise to more frontier incidents and campaigns, creating an ideal situation for more nomadic infiltration. The most striking demographic change that took place in northern Mesopotamia under the Parthians was the increase of Arab infiltration from the desert. These hardy sons

[20] Murray, *loc. cit.*

[21] Cf. Williams, in *Bulletin of John Rylands Library*, pp. 46, 51; *The Acts of the Martyrs* are described by Williams as "partisan in the extreme . . . embellished with legendary details." See also S. Brock, "Christians in the Sasanian Empire: a case of Divided Loyalties," in Stuart Mews, ed., *Religion and National Identity* (Oxford, 1982), p. 5, and Asmussen, pp. 933 *seq.*

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and daughters of the desert came, settled and gradually established autonomous principalities some of which flourished as caravan cities and garrison towns. Under the Parthians, the leading principality was that of Hatra, the capital of the province known as Arbaye in northern Mesopotamia. Under the Sasanians, the chief client principality was in southern Mesopotamia with the city of al-Hira, another Arab city, as its center. Al-Hira was ruled by the Lakhmid dynasty whose semi-independent kings ruled it for the last three centuries of the Sasanid period (300–600). Lakhmid Arab, who in the 6th century became Nestorian Christians and launched their missions into Arabia, also helped guard Persia's military, political, and commercial interests in both the Arabian peninsula and Syria.[22] In Syria the Byzantines had their own anti-Persian buffer states, the most powerful being the Ghassanid Arabs, most of them "Jacobite" Christians.

By the fifth century, after the Sasanian forces had repulsed the Byzantines beyond the boundaries of Mesopotamia, Persian rulers once more found it advantageous to protect the new stream of unwanted Christians from the enemy state. The Church under Byzantium was by then torn by controversy and schism; it persecuted and banished those it considered heretical, closing their schools and churches. The refugees again found shelter in Persian territories, mainly in northern Mesopotamia. This is the period in Church history when "ecumerical" councils started to debate and define the mystical doctrines of the Christian faith. The theological positions taken by the churches of the Byzantine empire during these deliberations are confused and confusing and need not long detain us.[23] But because the questions that the church fathers raised in the 5th

[22] Al-Ḥīra had a cosmopolitan population made up of Arabs, Persians, and Aramean Christians representing both the Church of the East and the Syrian Orthodox Church. For details on these autonomous Arab principalities, see Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, v. 1, pts 1 and 2 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), and his "Lakhmids," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Consult also Oates, "Northern Iraq," pp. 62 seq. Eilers, pp. 487–488; Bosworth, *Cambridge History of Iran, op. cit.*, p. 596; Segal, *Proceedings*, pp. 120 seq.; Nau, *Les Arabes chrétiens de Mesopotamie et de Syrie*; H. Charles, *Le Christianisme des Arab nomades sur le Limes*; J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London, 1979).

[23] An appropriate commentary made on these controversies, hopefully coming to an end in our own day, was made by a 7th century patriarch of the Nestorian church, Isho'yahb II (628–646). Commenting on the synod gathered at Chalcedon, the prelate commended the participants for their good intentions to restore the faith; but they also slipped from the true faith "owing to their feeble phraseology, wrapped in an obscure meaning, [thus] they provided a stumbling block to many." Brock, *Syriac Dialogue*, p. 28.

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century would continue to be a source of passionate debate for centuries to come, often leading to violence, let us pause very briefly and examine the two most important of these councils.[24]

The Christological Controversies

The first Christians, Jews, a people devoted to the basic belief that God is one, believed that their God had a personal relationship with them, his people; He was a deity who controlled and determined the course of nature and history. As Christians, Jews believed that God had revealed himself by becoming present among them in human form. In Jesus, God had become man, conceived by the Holy Ghost, also referred to as the Holy Spirit. This led to the doctrine of the Trinity—that in Jesus Christ we had God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Ghost. With a theology so mystical and unknowable, it was inevitable that the early Christians would devote much thought, then and in our day,[25] to answer the question of how the three members of the Trinity were related to one another.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, questions raised about the humanity and divinity of Jesus were debated and settled in church councils convened by the Byzantine emperors themselves. At the Third Ecumenical Council held in Ephesus (431), convened by the emperor Theodosius II at the request of Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, a theological controversy dealing with the issue of the relation of Christ's humanity to his divinity led to the first schism between the East and West. The question being asked, especially by the School of Antioch (present-day Antakiya in Turkey), revolved around the nature of the union between divine and human: To what extent did God became man in the person of Jesus Christ?

As early as the fourth century, the head of a monastic establishment close to Antioch, Diodorus of Tarsus, had tried to emphasize the completeness of the human nature of Christ. He emphasized the distinction between the divine and human natures of Christ to the point of undermining their unity. The most prominent exponent of

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[24] Centuries later, these Christological controversies would give the Muslims ample material in their anti-Christian polemics. See G. Vajda, "Ahl al-Kitab," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, rev. ed., vol. 1, p. 265.

[25] See below, pp. 255ff.

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these controversial views in the fifth century was Nestorius. Following the teaching of the school of Antioch and the Christological studies started by Diodorus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nestorius emphasized the completeness of the human nature of Jesus; he denied that the divine and human Jesus Christ could be thought of as a single person. To the "Nestorians," the humanity of Jesus was real and this implied a human personality; so they preferred the formula *two natures of Christ after the union.* The Alexandria school, led by Cyril, the patriarch of that city, proposed the formula of *one nature after the union*—divine—since, according to them, there was no independent humanity after God became man; the Alexandria school spoke of God assuming and expressing Himself through human nature. The Nestorian doctrine was condemned as heretical at Ephesus.

The controversy continued and led twenty years later to the Fourth Ecumenical Council, convened by the Emperor Marcian in 451; it met at Chalcedon, a town in Asia Minor across the straits from Constantinople. This was the largest of the four ecumenical conferences of the early Church; the emperor and his empress attended all the sessions as the conferees sought to clarify (however improbably) the formulas arrived at in Ephesus. The new declaration stressed that Christ, in order to be savior of humanity, had to be both man and God. Leaning now closer to the Nestorian formula, without accepting it, the Chalcedonian formula spoke of Christ as *one person in two natures.* The *one person*, however, did not result "from" the two natures; Christ incarnate was a single Person—God and man at the same time. The new definition emphasized that the distinction of the two natures is by no means destroyed in the union; the quality of each nature, human and divine, is preserved and both are united in one person and one hypostasis (the personality of Christ as distinguished from his two natures). After the Council of Ephesus, those who adhered to the teachings of Nestorius organized their own church, establishing themselves first in Edessa. They were driven out of there soon after the Council of Chalcedon, forced to move further east in the direction of Mesopotamia and Persia.

"Nestorianism" Finds a Home in Persia

Fortunately for "Nestorianism" in Persian territories, it had able leaders such as Barsauma, a refugee from Edessa who had founded the

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Nestorian theological school at Nisibis, and the long-lived scholar-theologian who directed the school there, Narsai (399–502). The seminary became the center from which Nestorianism spread in Persia until it was eclipsed by the school of Seleucia-Ctesiphon founded by Mar Aba in mid-sixth century. During the reign of Shah Peroz (457–484), Barsauma is said to have played an active role in the propagation of the doctrines taught by Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius; he was most probably convinced by Barsauma that it would be best for the authorities if all the Christians of his realm were made to accept the doctrines opposed by the Western church.[26]

Mainly for political reasons, the Church of the East convinced itself of the rightness of the "Nestorian" position and through the centuries repeated its formulas and rhetoric. The Church started calling itself Nestorian, not an entirely inappropriate name, since theirs became the only church in Christendom that sanctified Nestorius in its liturgy, together with his teacher Theodore of Mopsuestia who was given an even more prominent position in church services. To even the score with the Western church, the Church of Persia anathematized the Council of Ephesus for having condemned Nestorius, making it the only Christian body that takes that position.[27] It should

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[26] J.-M. Sauget, "Barsauma of Nisibis," in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, I, p. 112; Arthur Vööbus, *History of the School of Nisibis* (1965); D.W. Johnson, "Christian Church in Persia," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer (New York, 1983), v. 3, pp. 312–313. According to Johnson, Barsauma had intercepted an incriminating letter by the Catholicos Babowai to the Roman Emperor Zeno; this enabled Barsauma to have a pro-Nestorian catholicos placed over the Church. Consult also Asmussen, p. 942, where Barsauma is depicted as "a ruthless advocate of Nestorianism"; R.N. Frye, "The Political History of Iran under the Sasanians," in *Cambridge History of Iran*, 3 (1), p. 149, noting that toward the end of the fifth century "Nestorianism was established as the sole allowed sect of Christians in the Sasanian empire."

[27] It was not until the seventh century that the Church in Persia first took notice of the Council of Chalcedon, over a century and a half after it had taken place. In 612 under the leadership of Babai the Great, its synod emphasized that in the "one person"—*parsopa*—of Christ there are "two natures and two hypostases"—*Qnome*. For Mary the title of Mother of Christ was used in place of Mother of God—*Theotokos*—her title in the orthodox formula. For the Christology of the Nestorian Church in Persia, see S.P. Brock, "The Christology of the Church of the East in the Synods in the Fifth to Early Seventh Centuries," in *Aksun-Thyateira* (*Festschrift* to honor Archbishop Methodius), (Athens, 1985), pp. 125–142. Consult also A. Vööbus, *A History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, CSCO, Subsidia 14 (Leuven, 1958); S. Gero, *Barsauma of Nisibis and Persian Christianity in the Fifth Century, ibid.*, Subsidia 63, (Leuven, 1981), p. 426; Luise Abramowski and Alan E. Goodman, eds., and trs., *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1972); Robert V. Sellers, *Two Ancient Christologies* (London, 1940). See also Milton V. Anastos,

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be noted that even before the Christological controversies had started, the Christians in Persia, in order to gain the favor of their rulers, early found it necessary to sever their ties with their co-religionists in Byzantine Syria. To prove that they were not an appendage of the Western church, these "Eastern Syrians" resolved at the Synod of 424, to proclaim the independence of their See of Seleucia-Ctesiphon by making no appeals thereafter to the Greek hierarchy in the West.[28]

Thanks to the Christological Controversies of the 5th century, the loyalty of Persian Christian subjects was no longer in doubt by the sixth century; indeed, their status improved. By the seventh century these Christians were identified by the Persian government with Nestorianism—"those who proclaim the name of Nestorius," Shah Khusraw Parviz called them in 612.[29] Asmussen has noted that Nestorianism tried also to come to terms with Zoroastrianism, the national religion of Iran. Nestorian emphasis on Christ's true humanness and the anti-ascetic tendencies of the movement, were favored by the Zoroastrians, who were opposed to the orthodox Christian belief that an earthly woman had given birth to a God and that God was crucified and died.[30]

As the Nestorian Church grew, so did the number of its gentile members, including native Persians, Arameans, and Arabs. In return for the Church's loyalty to the state and for the taxes paid, the Sasanians officially recognized the Church of the East and its faithful; this meant that the state would enforce the decisions of the Church hierarchy, and in times of dissensions within the Christian community, government authorities would intervene in order to resolve them. As early as the Synod of 410, the church expected the government to enforce the decisions of its hierarchy. The acts of that Synod, "were guaranteed," writes Morony, "by the threat of excommunication and of punishment by the King of Kings for anyone

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Nestorius was Ortodox, Dumbarton Oaks Papers, No. 16 (Washington, D.C., 1962.) For the ecumenical nature of the Christological discussions at the time of this writing (1998), see below, pp. 255ff.

[28] See Brock, *Syriac Dilaogue*, p. 75; Cf. Segal, *Proceedings*, p. 132.

[29] Morony, p. 358. See also Fiey, "Nasara," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, p. 971. where he notes that the Church in Persian lands had been "officially Nestorian" since 486. See also above, pp. 1–3.

[30] Asmussen, pp. 939–945. Zoroastrians were also offended by some of the Jewish religious practices, such as ritual bathing. "For Magians," writes Morony, "Jews were a source of impurity and corruption in the world." *Op. cit.*, pp. 314–315. See also Garsoïan, p. 585, Williams, pp. 40–41.

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who failed to accept them." By the end of the 6th century we find both the Nestorians and Jacobites well organized as religious entities, with their own churches, schools, monasteries, and their own ecclesiastical judges, using the canons of the church as the laws of the community.[31]

The growing Christian population, its numbers partly swelled by the conversion of former Zoroastrians, eventually alarmed and alienated the Zoroastrian establishment. A.V. Williams writes of thousands of Zoroastrians from all ranks of society who converted to Christianity. What seems to have especially scandalized Zoroastrian authorities was the fact that those among their community who had embraced Christianity, had turned vehemently against the "Good Religion" of their ancestors.[32] Partly because of this mutual antipathy that existed between the "Magians" and the Christians, and partly due to the irreconcilable religious and political antagonism that existed between the two enemy empires, Christian Byzantium and Zoroastrian Iran, Christian expansion in Persia, in the end, was halted and "severely repressed"[33]

As an officially recognized institution, the Church had imperceptibly become an agent of the state. The state would enforce the practices and decisions of the Church. Government authorities could interfere in the affairs of the church, including the election of its catholicos. Sasanian edicts of "tolerations" thus inevitably led to the politicization of the church and to irregular elections as well as the imposition of candidates who were acceptable to the government. Such state-church relation, as might be expected, increased internal dissension and led to frequent personal rivalries and scandalous intrigues that often resulted in the sometimes reluctant interference of state officials in the unseemly quarrels of the Christian minority.[34] This state of affairs would continue when a new people and a new faith took over from Zoroastrian Persians—Muslim Arabs.

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[31] Morony, p. 358; Eilers in *Cambridge History of Iran*, p. 500.

[32] A.V. Williams, Zoroastrians and Christians in Sasanian Iran," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library*, v. 78, no. 3 (Autumn, 1996), pp. 39, 44–48. See also Morony, p. 342; Asmussen, pp. 940–942; Neusner, *Cambridge History of Iran*, p. 916; Brock, "Christians in the Sasanian Empire," p. 6.

[33] Garsoïan, pp. 584–585, 590–592. See also Morony, p. 334, on Shah Parviz's persecution of "all Christians, Nestorian and Monophysites," during the invasion of Persian territory by Heraklios in 626.

[34] For details, see Morony, pp. 332–342.

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Muslim-Arab Conquest

Despite the seventh-century Arab invasion's disruptive effect on Sasanian society, many of the old Persian customs and practices were continued. Muslim governors of Iraq, a land for centuries ruled by the Parthians and Sasanians, started applying Persian theories and practices of government and appropriated to themselves the prerogatives of the Sasanians "without missing a beat."[35] Members of the Aramean community of Iraq, mostly Nestorian Christians, and many of them Persian converts who had held offices of trust under the Sasanians, now served the Arab administration. While the Arabian conquerors would deny non-Muslims the privilege of serving as warriors for the new faith, they allowed them to retain their important positions. Indeed this could not have been otherwise; during this early period Christians enjoyed an "enormous numerical superiority" over Muslims not only in Iraq but also in Syria, Palestine and Egypt.[36] Non-Muslims everywhere were desperately needed and, what is more, they served their new rulers loyally and well, whether as civil servants and professionals, or as spies and guides, or as teachers and translators, who would eventually introduce the Arabians to the mysteries of Greek science, medicine, and philosophy.

The Qur'an on Christians and Jews

The formal decisions that the Muslims had early reached in Mecca and Medina in their relation with the Jews and Christians—minority communities in the Arabian peninsula—could not be easily applied outside Arabia where the Muslims themselves were an uninitiated minority. The new conquerors soon found it necessary to extend the definition of terms originally applied to Christians and Jews—such as *Ahl al-Kitāb* (People of the Book)—to include members of other

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[35] Victoria L. Erhart, "The Church of the East during the period of the Four Rightly-Guided Caliphs," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library*, v. 78, no. 3 (Autumn, 1996), pp. 60–61, 69. For an impressive and detailed study of Iraq in late antiquity that embraces both the pre- and early-Islamic period (300–700), see Morony's *Iraq*.

[36] Claude Cahen, "Dhimmis," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 2, pp. 227, 229; C.E. Bosworth, "Dhimmis in Early Islam," in B. Lewis and Benjamin Braude, eds., *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: the functioning of a plural society*. New York, 1982, p. 42; Erhart, p. 69.

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faith and ethnic backgrounds;[37] indeed, some of the verses of the Qur'an itself needed clarification for while a few of them commended the Christians and Jews as a people who had received God's revelation, other verses condemn them.[38] ("Remember We gave to Moses the Book and sent after him many an apostle; and to Jesus son of Mary We gave clear evidence of the truth, reinforcing him with divine grace" (2:87). Yet we also read: "You will find the Jews and the idolaters most excessive in hatred of those who believe; and the closest in love to the faithful are the people who say 'We are followers of Christ,' because there are priests and monks among them and they are not arrogant" (5:82). "O believers, if you follow what some of the people of the Book say, it will turn you into unbelievers even after you have come to belief" (3:100)).

According to a recent study, the Qur'anic verses that commend the Christians refer neither to the historical nor the living community that called itself Christian, but to those who match the Islamic ideal.[39] From the perspective of Qur'anic exegetical tradition, the true Christian is one who becomes Muslim when presented with the message of the Prophet Muhammad. Speaking of these "Qur'anic Christians," is this verse: "For when they [Christians] listen to what has been revealed to this Apostle [Muhammad], you can see their eyes brim over with tears at the truth which they recognize, and say: 'O Lord, we believe; put us down among those who bear witness (to the truth)" (5:83). Indeed, in a Qur'anic verse, the coming of the Arabian prophet is foretold by Jesus. "And when Jesus, son of Mary, said: 'O children of Israel, I am sent to you by God to confirm the Torah (sent) before me, and to give you good tidings of an apostle who will come after me, whose name is Ahmad (the praised one).' Yet when he has come to them with clear proofs, they say: 'This is only magic'" (61:6).[40]

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[37] Cahen, *loc. cit.*; Bosworth, *ibid.*

[38] F.E. Peters, *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton University Press, 1990), vol. 2 (*The Word and the Law and the People of God*), pp. 237, 379–380; Bosworth, "Dhimmis in Early Islam," p. 42.

[39] See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians, an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 286, and *passim.* McAuliffe does not herself comment on the Qur'anic verses; she consults and analyzes the commentaries written since the tenth century by scholars recognized as authorities on Qur'anic questions (scholars of *tafsīr*). The study shows that the Christian self-understanding plays no role in these commentaries.

[40] See the Gospel of John, 14:16–17, 26, where Jesus is quoted saying: "and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another to be your advocate, who will be

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The verses that condemn Christians refer not to the "Qur'anic Christians," but to those who called themselves Christians and rejected Islam, and thus followed a "corrupted" form of revelation. ("The Christians say: 'Christ is the son of God.' That is what they say with their tongues following assertions made by unbelievers before them. May they be damned by God: How perverse are they!" (9:30).[41] "Some among them [the People of the Book] are moderate, but evil is what most of them do!" (5:66). "They are surely infidels who say: 'God is the Christ, son of Mary . . .' Whosoever associates a compeer with God, will have Paradise denied to him by God, and his abode shall be Hell." "Disbelievers are they surely who say: 'God is the third of the trinity' . . . if they do not desist from saying what they say, then indeed those among them who persist in disbelief will suffer painful punishment" (5:72–73)).

Despite their "errors," Christians and Jews could still live within the Abode of Islam—as opposed to the Abode of War, which referred to territories that lay outside the political control of the Muslims. As a people to whom God had already revealed himself, Christians and Jews did not have to convert to Islam, but they had to be fought if they did not pay a protective tribute in submission: ["Fight those People of the Book who do not believe in God and the Last Day, who do not prohibit what God and His Apostle have forbidden, or accept divine law, until all of them pay protective tribute in submission" (9:29).][42] As for the polytheists and those who disbelieved

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with you for ever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because the world neither sees nor knows him; but you will know him, because he dwells with you and will be in you." "Advocate" in the above quotation is referred to again in verse 26 by Jesus as "the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name." (From *Oxford Study Bible.*) In Greek "advocate" was translated into "Paraclete" (Greek *Parakletos*) and into "Comforter" in English; in Aramaic it was rendered as *Mnahmana*, meaning compassionate (*mrahmana* in modern Aramaic = *rahman* in Arabic.) According to Ibn Isḥāq (d. c. 767), author of the Prophet Muhammad's biography—*sīrah*), preserved only in Ibn Hishām's (d. c. 833) recension, "Muhammad" is linguistically equivalent to "baraqlitis" and "Manhamanna," which, most probably, is a corruption of the Aramaic Mnahmana. Consult A. Guthrie and E.F.F. Bishop, "The Paraclete, Almunhamanna and Ahmad," *The Muslim World*, 41 (1951), 251–256; William Montgomery Watt, "His Name is Ahmad," *ibid.*, 43 (1953), 110–117; McAuliffe, p. 183 n. 10.

[41] Trans. Ahmed Ali. Saiyed Abbas Sadr's translation: "Allah's curse be on them, how they are deluded away from the truth." *An Enlightening commentary into the Light of the Holy Qur'an*, ed. "by a Group of Muslim scholars," (Isfahan, Iran, 1996), v. 2, p. 298). See also Peters, *Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, vol. 2, pp. 345 seq.

[42] For the Christians to "prohibit what God and His Apostle have forbidden" was tantamount to the renunciation of the basic tenets of the Christian faith: the

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in God, they were to be "summoned" to Islam and fought if they refused. "If they refuse, seek God's help and fight against them."[43]

Christians and Jews within the Abode of Islam were also considered a legally "protected" people—*Ahl al-dhimmah*—but without being an integral part of the Islamic *Umma* (community). They shared neither the rights nor the responsibilities of the community of believers, but had rights and obligations of their own. Their protection assured them their life and property; they also enjoyed the freedom to worship their own religion and to govern themselves in accordance with their own laws. There were, on the other hand, certain restrictions that were imposed on them: they could not seek the conversion of a Muslim, and apostacy was, in principle, subject to death penalty. A Muslim could marry a dhimmi woman, but the converse was not allowed; the child of a mixed marriage was a Muslim; a dhimmi could not own a Muslim slave; and the dhimmis had to wear distinguishing articles of clothing and dress.[44]

For the rights that were allowed them, dhimmis had to pay not only the *jizya*, a poll tax, but also a more taxing tribute on land, the *kharāj*. Those who converted to Islam, on the other hand, were freed of all tribute during the early years of Muslim expansion. This gave apostacy a strong economic motive. Evidence points out that conversions to Islam among the Nestorian Christians took place soon after the Persians were conquered (637). A few of those who took advantage of the material rewards that conversion to Islam presented were rebellious bishops—and undoubtedly many of their followers—who challenged the central authority of their own catholicos.[45]

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crucifixion, resurrection, and the concept of Trinity; for the Jews, the Qur'anic injunction meant acceptance of Jesus as the son of Virgin Mary and as a prophet reinforced "with divine grace." The "submission" of the People of the Book stood for their being "humbled"—"wa-hum saghirun," humbled. Yet in Sura ii, verse 256, we read: "Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in God hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And God heareth and knoweth all things."

[43] This too was an injunction that would need reinterpretation, especially after Islamic conquests expanded into lands where polytheism predominated, as on the Indian subcontinent. It was not clear whether submission without conversion, offered to the People of the Book, was also an option for the idolaters and polytheists. See Peters, *loc. cit.*

[44] For more on the guidelines on Christian behavior under Islam, see Peters, *loc. cit.*, pp. 380–382. Consult also Antoine Fattal, *Le statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d'Islam* (Beirut, 1958).

[45] These conversions are referred to in the letters of Catholicos Mar Isho'yahb III (649–659). According to Erhart, "What seems to upset Isho'yahb more than

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Conversions to Islam as a result of heavy taxation were numerous, but they resulted in reduced revenue for the new rulers and led to migration of the converts from their lands and villages to the Muslim garrison town nearby. These defections were so great that the Umayyad governor of Iraq, Hajjaj bin Yusuf, drove the newly converted out of Muslim towns and forced them to pay their taxes.[46] These social and economic upheavals lasted for over a hundred years before it was decreed that all people, including Muslim Arabians, would have to pay the land tax.[47]

By its second century, the Islamic empire that the Arabs built with the help of a large number of ethnicities and traditions, was reinforced numerically, its institutions well organized, its culture and economy thriving. Despite the series of religious revolts and political rebellions that the Abbasids faced, a new civilization arose under them, "rich and original,"[48] nurturing intergroup relations that have been described as "singularly good."[49] Outstanding among the men of learning during this golden age of Islam were Aramaic-speaking Christians, especially the Nestorians, a community much influenced by Greek language and learning during the ten centuries of Hellenistic period that Islam brought to an end.

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these conversions is that the dissenting bishops have informed the local Arab authorities that they are no longer under obedience to the catholicos." For details on Ishoyahb's 105 letters, written over a twenty-year period, see Erhart, pp. 57–58, and J.-B. Fiey, "Isho'yaw le Grand," in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, xxxvi/2 (1970), 31–41.

[46] G.R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam, The Umayyad Caliphate A.D. 6661–750* (Carbondale, IL, 1987), pp. 70–71. See also Daniel C. Dennett, Jr., *Conversion and the Poll Tax in Early Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950). Dennett takes the position that the Arab invasion was about booty and the annual payment of taxes. See also John C. Lamoreaux. "Early Eastern Christian Responses to Islam," in John Victor Tolan, ed. *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam* (New York: Garland Medieval Casebooks, vol. 10 (1996), p. 6, where Ali, the fourth caliph, is quoted to have said of the people of Iraq: "Leave them to be a source of revenue and aid for the Muslims."

[47] While Muslims did not pay a poll tax, they were required to pay *zakāt*, a "poor tax," raised and distributed among Muslims as "statutory alms tithe," generally averaging two and a half percent. "Even soldiers' pensions were not exempt," writes Hitti. With the disintegration of the purely Islamic state, *zakāt* became a voluntary contribution. See Hitti, *A History of the Arabs* (1963), pp. 371–372.

[48] B. Lewis, "Abbasids," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2: 19–20. See also Andre Ferre, "Chrétiene de Syrie et de Mesopotamie aux deux premiers siècles de l'Islam," *Islamochristiana*, 14 (1988), 71–106.

[49] Cahen, *loc. cit.* For "the glory that was Baghdad," see Philip K. Hitti, *The Arabs, a Short History* (Princeton University Press, 1949), pp. 93–99.

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Greek, Syriac, and Arabic

As the state church of the Byzantine empire since the 4th century, the Christian Church used Greek as the language in its liturgy and theology.[50] After Greek, Syriac, an Aramaic dialect, was the most important written language in the eastern regions of the Roman Empire.[51] Even in Sasanian Persia, Syriac, much influenced by Greek language and learning, "virtually occupied a more prominent position as an organ of culture than the Persian language itself," wrote Nöldeke.[52] From the third century A.D., when the Sasanian dynasty came to power, until the 8th century, when the Islamic empire was centered in Baghdad, Christians, mainly in geographical Syria and Mesopotamia, produced an extensive literature in Syriac. It should be pointed out here that although the Nestorians of Persia had separated from the Western Church,[53] they had not divorced themselves from the West itself. They went there to study; in the sixth century no fewer than three Patriarchs of the Church of the East had each spent much of their youth in Byzantium in the study of medicine and philosophy as well as theology. According to Garsoïan, Persian authorities encouraged such contacts and promoted those who had studied in Byzantium.[54]

"Huge numbers" of theological works were translated from Greek into Syriac, writes Sebastian Brock. By the end of the seventh century, almost all the Greek Fathers had been translated in whole or in part. The Aramean natives of Syria and Mesopotamia, mainly Nestorians and Jacobites,[55] had become especially adept at transla-

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[50] As early as the 3rd century B.C. the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek for the use of the Hellenized Jews of Alexandia. See above, p. 9.

[51] See above, p. 1.

[52] Theodor Nöldeke, "Semitic Literature," *Encyclopedia Brittanica*, 11th ed., p. 625.

[53] See above, pp. 30–31.

[54] See Garsoïan, p. 576, where she points out that as early as 410, at the time of its official recognition by the Persian state, "The Christian Church was accurately informed concerning Orthodox canon law and the early ecclesiastical councils held on imperial [Byzantine] territory."

[55] The "Jacobites" had started to move from their homegrounds in Syria into the Tigris valley even before the advent of the Muslim Arabs, their migrations accelerating from the end of the 6th century on. With their coming into Sasanian territories, the Nestorian church was faced with the rise of a competing theology as well as a rival patriarch. Under Islamic rule, the two Christian parties, now under a single political umbrella, tried to strengthen their position under the new regime, inviting the uninterested governors into their internal affairs. For details see Oates, *op. cit.*, p. 117; Vööbus, *Hexapla*, p. 39; Erhart, pp. 70–71, and Segal, *Proceedings of*

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tion from Greek to Syriac, developing "very sophisticated methods of 'mirror translation,' aimed at reflecting all the details of the Greek original in the Syriac translation."[56] Thus with the advent of Islam, the *dhimmis* earnestly placed their knowledge at the service of the renaissance that was taking place in Baghdad, paving the way for the rebirth of Arabic literature and science, and ironically, leading also to the gradual decline and demise of Aramaic literature and learning.

The greatest patron of learning in Baghdad was the caliph himself, al-Ma'mun, son of the fabled Harun al-Rashid. His "House of Wisdom," (*Bayt al-Hikmah*) built in 830, served as a library, academy, and translation center, its staff made up mostly of Nestorian Christians.[57] The era's best known scholar-physician, who headed this academic enterprise, was Hunayn Ibn Ishaq, a Nestorian Christian originally from al-Hirah.[58] He first translated Greek works into Syriac and his son Ishaq rendered them into Arabic. Renowned for his knowledge of medicine, Hunayn's chief translations were almost all the works of Galen, including his seven books on anatomy, preserved in Arabic but lost in the Greek original. These literary and scientific initiatives gradually transformed Arabic from a language of poetry and religion into a polished medium for the writing of scientific and medical literature and philosophical treatises.[59]

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the British Academy, p. 139, where he notes that the feud between the two rival churches eventually resolved itself.

[56] Brock, *The Bible in Syriac Tradition*, pp. 22–24. See also *idem.*, "Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources," in his *Studies in Syriac Christianity*, Chapter IV, p. 212. Until the 5th century, according to Brock, it was the cultural traditions of the Jews and of ancient Mesopotamia on which Syrian Christianity drew.

[57] For the influential positions held by Nestorians at the court of the Caliph al-Ma'mun, see DeLacy O'Leary, *How Greek Science Passes to the Arabs* (London, 1951); Ernest G. Clarke, *The Selected Questions of Isho Bar Nun on the Pentateuch*, (Leiden, 1962), pp. 2 seq.; Richard Walzer. *Arabic Transmission of Greek Thought to Medieval Europe* (Manchester University Press, 1945), a reprint from the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, vol. 29, no. 1, July 1945.

[58] In Baghdad, Hunayn was a student of Ibn-Bakhtishu, another well known Nestorian, who served as the court physician. Hunayn was originally from Jundishapur, well known for its academies of medicine and philosophy. The courses offered there were based on Hellenistic learning with Aramaic as the language of instruction. In Baghdad Ibn Bakhtishu became the founder of a "Brilliant family which for six or seven generations almost monopolized the court medical practice." Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, pp. 310 seq.

[59] Hunayn's son Ishaq, according to Philip K. Hitti, is the greatest translator of Aristotle's works in Arabic. *Loc. cit.* See also Walzer, p. 116, where Hunayn is reported traveling in search of Greek manuscripts and rare books in Mesopotamia,

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The remarkably rapid expansion of Islam inevitably led to the decline of the Christian population itself. Once the Muslims attained majority status, they began to delimit more clearly the rights of the non-Muslim minorities.[60] There were times when non-Muslims were subjected to excessive exactions and temporary persecutions, usually when Muslims were at war with Christian Byzantium. During these periods of tension and decline, more Christians and Jews converted to Islam—this time, not to escape heavy taxation but to relieve social pressure, especially felt among the educated classes. Conversion to Islam alone allowed full integration into the privileged society.[61]

The restrictions imposed on non-Muslims were not evenly or uniformly enforced; conservative jurists read the guidelines on the subject more literally than others. Sometimes a ruler, either through religious zeal or political weakness, supported measures that the zealous advocated, or he yielded to demonstrations against the *dhimmis* that the mobs agitated.[62] Yet during its years of decline the Abbasid empire as a whole lacked law and order. Rulers more and more employed mercenary troops, whose leaders undermined political stability through frequent uprisings, leading to economic as well as cultural decline. Missing a strong bond between the subject peoples, the government emphasized religion as a uniting factor. Heretical Muslims did not fare better—and sometimes fared worse—than the Christians.

Interestingly, some of the early discriminatory customs were still on the books as late as the nineteenth century.[63] In a number of urban centers the ethnic origin of the man on the street was often discernible from his dress, especially from the turban that he wore. Writing of Baghdad, which he visited in the 1870s, Max von Thielmann noted that "everyone's nationality and creed are easily distinguishable at a distance." The Jew always could be recognized by his blue and flowery headdress and the huge blue cotton tassel on the fez underneath. The Syrian Orthodox and the Chaldeans of the

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Syria, Palestine and Egypt; Stuart Fleming, "Islamic Science in Baghdad: a Greek Inheritance," *Archaeology*, 38, n. 4 (July–August, 1985), 60–61.

[60] For details, see Cahen, *loc. cit.*

[61] J.M. Fiey, "Naṣāra," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 7:971, and his "Chrétiens syriaques sous les Abbassides surtout à Baghdad (749–1258)," *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalum*, subsidia 59. Louvain, 1980.

[62] Cahen, *loc. cit.*

[63] See author's *Muslim-Christian Relations*, pp. 22 seq.

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nineteenth century wore a black silk turban, unless they had adopted the fez without any turban, "as worn by Turks and Armenians."[64] In some localities restrictions on dress and color were disregarded, but the freedom to ride a horse was denied to non-Muslims. Yet even this restriction was not uniformly applied. In Mardin, the Syrian Orthodox patriarch not only rode a horse but had a bridle and martingale that were green—Prophet Muhammad's color—and this gave no offense, while in Damascus at the same time such a disregard of custom, Buckingham noted, would probably have cost a Christian his life. Half a century after Buckingham, even in Damascus these restrictions and prejudices had passed away. The Christian, wrote a British consul in 1867, "could wear any kind of dress and ride horses at his pleasure."[65] If an allowance is made "for the superiority which the Mahometans assume over all who are of another faith," observed an eighteenth-century Englishman, interfaith relations in towns "were fairly cordial."[66]

The *millet* system of government—a major development in church-state relations started under the Sasanians—was given a specifically legal and religious base under Muslim rule. Islamic *Shariʿah* law, being both civil and religious, could not be applied integrally to non-Muslim communities. Like true theocracies, these religious bodies continued to be recognized and placed under the jurisdiction of the religious heads of their respective creeds. The various churches and non-Muslim faiths were each transformed into a kind of ecclesiastical state whose jurisdiction extended not merely to matters of personal status, such as marriage and inheritance, but also to most disputes that occurred within the community. The dhimmis eventually became an appendage of the Islamic body politic. Isolated and weakened politically and economically, they declined educationally and culturally, dominated by their own conservative tribal and religious leaders.

The coming of the Mongols in the thirteenth century briefly raised the hope of better days for the Christians. Before the Mongol khans became zealous converts to Islam, there were still a number of Christian Turko-Tartar tribes in Central Asia, and more than one

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[64] See his *Journey in the Caucasus, Persia, and Turkey in Asia*, trans. Charles Heneage (London, 1875), v. 2, p. 158.

[65] Author's *Muslim-Christian Relations, loc. cit.*

[66] *Ibid.*

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of the Mongol emperors and viceroys were known to have been Christian.[67] Guyuk (d. 1248), the grandson of Chingiz Khan, had a Christian vizier and was himself described as a "true Christian." During Guyuk's reign, the numerous Christian bodies in the realm enjoyed high prestige.[68]

While Hulagu, who brought about the downfall of the Arab Islamic empire, did not himself profess Christianity, his queen Doquz Khatun was a Nestorian Christian.[69] Aware of the good relations that existed between the Mongols and his own Christian subjects, the caliph al-Musta'ṣim sent the Nestorian patriarch along with one of his viziers in order "to treat with Hulagu." But Hulagu was not moved; according to Bar Hebraeus, he "continued the war with still greater ferocity."[70] Baghdad was sacked and Musta'ṣim murdered.[71] The Christians were spared thanks to "the magnanimity, the wisdom and marvelously high character" of Hulagu; the Nestorian patriarch "was given rich endowments and a former royal palace as his residence and church."[72]

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[67] L.E. Browne, *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia from the Time of Muhammad till the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1933); Fiey, "Naṣāra," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, p. 973, and *idem*, "Chrétiens syriaques sons les Mongols," *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalum*, vol. ccclxii, subsidia 44 (Louvain, 1975). According to Fiey, "Numerous Mongol tribes, Uighurs, Naimans, and Keraits, were in fact Christian." See also David Bundy, "The Syriac and Armenian Responses to the Islamification of the Mongols," in John Victor Tolan, ed., *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam* (New York, Garland Medieval Casebooks, vol. 10, 1996, p. 33, where he notes that when the Il-Khanids arrived in Baghdad, they had Muslims in their ranks and the Golden Horde farther north had already converted to Islam.

[68] Mingana, "The Early Spread of Christianity," p. 312; Brian E. Colless, "The Nestorian Province of Samarqand," *Abr-Nahrain*, 24 (1986), 51–57; Fiey "Naṣāra," *ibid.*, where he notes that the Mongols installed Christian governors in numerous towns, such as Mosul, Irbil, Jazirat Ibn 'Umar.

[69] See the author's *Muslim-Christian Relations*, pp. 16–17.

[70] Ibn al-'Ibri, *Chronography*, vol. 1, p. 430; vol. 2, pp. 504–5; Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades* (Cambridge, 1954), vol. 3, pp. 302–4; Gaston Wiet, *Baghdad: Metropolis of the Abbasid Caliphate*, trans. Seymour Feiler (Normal, OK: 1971), p. 52.

[71] John A. Boyle, "The Death of the Last Abbasid Caliph: a Contemporary Muslim Account," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, v. 6, n. 2 (Autumn, 1961), 145–161; G.M. Wickens, "Nasir ad-Din Tusi on the Fall of Baghdad: a Further Study," in *ibid.* v. 7, n. 1 (Spring, 1962), 23–35.

[72] J.-M. Fiey, "Chrétien syriaques sous les mongols (Il-Khanate de Perse, XIII^{e} - XIV^{e} s.) *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalum*, 362, Subsidia 44 (1975); C. Dawson, ed. and trans., *The Mongol Mission: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the 13th and 14th Centuries* (New York, 1955), pp. 161–62; *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 9, p. 1060. For the good relations between the Nestorians and the Mongols, see also Abu al-Fiḍa, *Taqwīm al-Buldān*, ed. J.T. Reinaud and de Slane (Paris, 1840), pp. 136–37; Ibn al-'Ibri, *ibid.* Cf., Bundy, p. 33, who notes that

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Not only were a number of Mongol officials Nestorian Christians but Christians of Mongol origin were ordained as officials of the Church. The Metropolitan of Cathay in 1280 was a Mongol Nestorian ordained under the name of Yaballaha and later elected patriarch as Yaballaha III (1281–1317), most probably a "political" appointment. Yaballaha resided in Maragha about eighteen miles to the east of Lake Urmiyah, a town made famous by its library and observatory.[73] Yaballaha's contemporary and companion, Rabban Sauma (d. 1317), another Nestorian churchman of Tartar origin, attained fame for his extensive travels in Europe as an ambassador of Arghun, who sought to woo Christian kings and princes against Islam. Rabban Sauma traveled as far as France to meet Edward I of England. On his failed mission, he also met with Popes Honorius IV and Nicholas IV, as well as King Philip of France.[74] Unfortunately for the Christians, the century of Yaballaha III and Rabban Sauma also saw the conversion of the descendants of Hulagu to Islam. Under the seventh Il-Khan, Ghazan Mahmud, Islam was finally recognized by the Mongols as the state religion; one of the decrees that Ghazan issued was that Christians and Jews wear distinctive dress.[75] By the close of the thirteenth century, the whirlwind that Tamerlane launched passed through and destroyed most of the Christian centers that lay in its path. In the chapters that follow we shall briefly trace their history as it unfolded beyond that point.

Schism within the "Nestorian" Church

Accession to the highest office in the church hierarchy, as already intimated,[76] has often caused controversy and division within the churches of the Middle East. As early as mid-fifteenth century, the elected patriarch of the Nestorian Church, Shamun Basidi, had enacted a law that restricted his office to members of his own family. Since the primate had to be a celibate, his office passed on to

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among the victims of the Mongol invasion were large numbers of Syriac Christians—including Nestorians—as well as Armenians and Georgians.

[73] Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (1963), pp. 488, 683.

[74] J.A. Montgomery, tr., *The History of Yaballaha III... and of Bar Sauma* (New York, 1927).

[75] Bundy, p. 35.

[76] See above p. 44.

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his nearest relative, usually a nephew succeeding his uncle in that office. Hereditary succession, however, was contrary to the canons of the Church, which provided that "no Bishop may nominate his successor"; moreover, the practice sometimes brought minors and wholly unworthy, if not ignorant, candidates to the patriarchal office. Consequently, hereditary arrangement became a fruitful source of dissension among the people. The ordinance was seriously challenged in mid-sixteenth century and the dispute erupted into a schism.

When Shamun Dinkha (Dinha) succeeded his uncle in 1551, influential families, encouraged by recently-arrived Roman Catholic missionaries, elected Hanna (Youhannan) Sulaqa, a monk from the monastery of Rabban Hurmizd, as a more suitable person. With the aid of the Franciscan missionaries at Mosul, Sulaqa was sent to Jerusalem and then to Rome where he was well received by Pope Julius III. He was accepted as "Catholic" and ordained in 1553 as the first Uniat patriarch. Upon his return, the patriarchate that he started was established in Diyarbakr, far removed from the Mosul-Alqush region, a stronghold of the Nestorian Church. From Diyarbakr, the Catholic See was moved to Seert and then to Salmas and Urmiya, finally settling in the village of Qochanis in Hakkari, where it remained until World War I. The Sulaqa line, which started in 1553, came to an end when the patriarch then in office, Shamun XIII, renounced Catholicism, about 1670. Sulaqa's successors adopted the name of Mar Shamun soon after Sulaqa's death; it is not clear when after Sulaqa the succession became hereditary again.[77]

The original line of patriarchs, successors of Shamun Dinkha, continued as Nestorian primates. Some of the successors, who called themselves Mar Eliyya, tried to reconcile with Rome in order to bring to an end the rival branch that Sulaqa had started. In 1607, Mar Eliyya VI was accepted as Catholic and received into union with Rome, thus creating two formerly "Nestorian" patriarchs, now both Catholic. The successor of Eliyya VII, however, renounced Catholicism, thus creating after about 1692 two Nestorian patriarchs, one residing in Azerbayjan, a Mar Shamun from the Sulaqa line; the

[77] Sulaqa himself was murdered by the orders of the Pasha of ʿAmadīyah at the alleged instigation of Shamun Dinkha. See R. Rabban, "Chaldean Rite," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Cf. Buṭrus Naṣri, "Aṣl al-Naṣātira al-Ḥāliyīn wa-Aḥwāluhum al-Dīnīya wa-al-Madanīya," *al-Mashriq*, 16 (1913), 491–504. The last patriarch of the Mar Shamun line, Mar Eshai Shamun XXI, was assassinated in the United States in 1975. For details on the post-World War I events and the beginnings of a new patriarchate in the 1970s, see below, pp. 247ff.

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other at Alqush near Mosul, a Mar Eliyya from the old and venerated "Aboona" family (Arabic "Bayt al-Ab"), surnamed Basidi.

Not everyone returned to the Nestorian Church; Mar Yusuf, the Nestorian Archbishop of Amid (Diyarbakr), a particularly Catholic center, followed the advice of the Capuchin missionaries there and withdrew from communion with the Mar Eliyyas in 1672. In 1681 Mar Yusuf was granted the title of patriarch—without specifying of where or of whom—by Pope Innocent XI and was known as Mar Yusuf. His successor, Mar Yusuf II, received the title of Patriarch of Babylon and the line continued until 1828 when Yusuf V died. Soon another candidate became available, a member of the Mar Eliyya family itself. The Mar Eliyya line of patriarchs came to an end in 1804 when Mar Eliyya XIII died without having a nephew to succeed him. His brother, Hanna Hurmizd, had turned Catholic and was granted permission in 1830 to perform the duties of a patriarch but was not allowed to use the patriarchal seal.[78] In 1838, Hurmizd was consecrated by Pope Pius VIII as "Chaldean Patriarch of Babylon," but only after he had agreed that he would abstain from admitting any of his relatives to the episcopal order.[79] Having thus abrogated the law of lineal succession, the Vatican appointed an outsider to the Chaldean patriarchate to succeed Hurmizd. The new patriarch was not only the first primate who was not from the Nestorian Mar Eliyya family, but in 1844 he became the first to obtain an Ottoman imperial firman recognizing him as Patriarch of the "Chaldeans" instead of the "Nestorians," the term used in previous firmans.[80] The Chaldean Uniat Church as we know it today was finally established on a strong foundation, independent of the Nestorian Church; its members, as Catholics, were legally recognized by the Ottoman government as "Chaldeans," a *millet* distinct and separate from the Nestorian community.

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[78] See Syriac manuscript written by John Hurmizd and translated in Badger, *op. cit.*, I, 152.

[79] B.M. Goormachtigh, "Histoire de la mission Dominicaine en Mesopotamie et en Kurdistan," *Analecte Sacri Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum*, 3 (1897), 202–204; D. Attwater, *The Christian Churches of the East*, (Milwaukee, 1961–62), I, 201; Nasri and Ibrahina, III, 884; A.A. King, II, 284; J. Tfinkdji, *L'Eglise chaldéenne catholique* (Paris, 1913), p. 15; cf. Badger, I, 163.

[80] Consult Buṭrus Naṣri, *Dhakhīrat al-Adhhān* (Mosul, 1903–1913), II, 308–309; Bābu-Isḥāq, p. 138, Badger, I, 171; George Young, *Corps de droit Ottoman* (Oxford, 1906), II, 116, 117, 119; cf. Frédéric von den Steen de Jehay, *De la situation légale des sujets Ottomans non-Muslmans* (Brussels, 1906), p. 273.

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Despite these formal distinctions, at the beginning of the nineteenth century the people of the plain of Mosul are reported to have been more "Nestorian" than Catholic both in sentiment and legal status. The desire to join the Roman Catholic Church was partly politically motivated because of the protection that the French government extended to all the Catholics of the Ottoman Empire. Although relations between the Roman Catholic and Nestorian churches go back to the sixteenth century,[81] it was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that Catholic missionary work started on an organized basis. According to a historian of nineteenth-century Catholic missions, when the Dominicans arrived in Mosul in 1748, the name "Catholic" was hardly known.[82] It was not until 1840, most probably as a result of Protestant missionary activities in this region,[83] that Catholic work—slowed down and interrupted by the French Revolution—was taken up in earnest again.[84] Until about the end of the last century, the people, and even some of the Chaldean patriarchs, were still emotionally attached to their old church and jealous of the many alterations made in their ancient customs.[85] As late as the eve of the First World War, many Chaldeans would reportedly have gladly rejoined the old Nestorian Church under Mar Shamun if he could only provide foreign protection equal to that which they received through the Papal delegate.[86]

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[81] Consult L.E. Louvet, *Les Missions catholiques au XIX^me^ siècle* (Lyon, n.d.), pp. 137–138; Piolet, I, 223–255; Bābu-Isḥāq, pp. 127–130; Louis Cheikho, "Rasūl al-Khayr al-'Am fi Madīnat al-Salām" *al-Mashriq*, 15 (1912), 161–179; Yūsuf Tfankji, "Naẓrah Ijmālīyah fi al-Ṭā'ifat al-Kaldānīyah al-Kathūlikīyah," *al-Najm*, I (1929), 225–229, 326–332.

[82] Louvet, pp. 137ff.

[83] For a discussion of Protestant missionary activity during the mid-nineteenth century, see below, pp. 65ff.

[84] For the reinforcement of the Roman Catholic missions at this time, see Coakley, pp. 170–185, 257–268, 310–313.

[85] J.W. Etheridge, *The Syrian Churches* (London, 1846), pp. 126–127; Grattan Geary, *Through Asiatic Turkey* (London, 1878), II, 80–84; Layard, *Nineveh*, I, 217; Badger, I, 170–171, Attwater, *Christian Churches*, I, 202; A.A. King, II, 286; Young, II, 217ff.; Goormachtigh, III, 204–208; Louvet, p. 138.

[86] S.H. Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900–1950* (London, 1953), p. 52. For more details on the establishment of the Chaldean Catholic Church see R. Rabban, "Chaldean Rite," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. At this writing (1999), the Chaldean Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East are engaged in an earnest ecumenical dialogue. For details, see below, pp. 253–256.

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Ottoman Nestorians

Whether or not the patriarchal family of the Nestorian Church in Hakkari was formally recognized by a firman from the Ottoman Sultan has not been clear. The Mar Eliyyas of Alqush, who antedated the Mar Shamuns of Qochanes,[87] received a firman of recognition from the Porte; it does not seem possible that two Nestorian patriarchs would be recognized at the same time. We know that after the Nestorians of the plain of Mosul turned Catholic and the Mar Eliyya line came to an end, Mar Shamun was invited by the Ottoman government to visit Istanbul where he would be duly authorized as the ecclesiastical, as well as the civil, head of his people.[88] This the patriarch refused to do, distrusting the motives of the Porte.[89]

In the 1870s, Ubicini reported that in 1864 there was the question of freeing the Nestorians from the tutelage of the Armenians by authorizing the Nestorian patriarch and bishops to deal directly with the government; but, he added, the matter was not followed up.[90] Authorities such as Steen de Jehay and others who were intimate with the Nestorians, also support the view that the Nestorian patriarch in Hakkari did not receive a firman of investiture from the

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[87] See reference to Mar Eliyya above, pp. 56-57.

[88] *Missionary Herald*, 43 (1847), 375; 44 (1848), 24; Anderson, I, 336.

[89] Great Britain, Public Record Office, *Foreign Office Papers on Turkey and Persia*, F.O. 78/2699, no. 360. See also F.O. 78/2702, no. 3003/Confidential, p. 6, hereafter cited as F.O. In a Foreign Office "Memorandum on Kurdistan" written in 1848, we find the Nestorians seeking "protection from the Porte, the recognition of their patriarch, the enjoyment of the right guaranteed to other Christian sects in the Empire."

[90] Until the nineteenth century there were only two formally recognized millets in the Ottoman Empire: the Greek Orthodox and the Orthodox Armenians (Gregorians). The patriarchs of these two millets were the only non-Muslim Ottoman dignitaries who could enter into direct negotiations with the Porte. The Armenian patriarch was the intermediary between the Porte and all the Ottoman subjects who were not Muslims or Greek Orthodox. The number of millets thus honored increased during the nineteenth century and the first formal addition to the roll of millets came in 1831 when the Catholic Armenians were recognized as a community distinct from their Orthodox brethren just as the Catholic Nestorians (Chaldeans) were so recognized in 1844. For details on this subject consult Alford Carleton, "The Millet System" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Hartford Theological Seminary, 1936), pp. 95, 137-140. A. Ubicini and Pavet de Courteille, *État présent de l'Empire Ottoman* (Paris, 1876), p. 204. See also Adolphe d'Avril, *La Chaldée Chrétienne* (Paris, 1864), p. 15; C. Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans, The Church and the Ottoman Empire 1453-1953* (Cambridge, 1983); *idem*, "The Formation of the Armenian Catholic Community in the Ottoman Empire," *Eastern Churches Review*, 7 (1975), 149-163.

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Porte.[91] Silbernagl wrote at the turn of the century that the patriarch in Hakkari had never been officially recognized by the Porte, adding that only the patriarchs of Mosul had received such a confirmation.[92]

A man like W. A. Wigram, who knew the patriarchal family and the people well, does not seem to be sure of the legal status of the Nestorian patriarch. In his book, *The Assyrians and Their Neighbours*,[93] he wrote that Mar Shamun was recognized by the sultan as "Lord of Qotchanis" (the patriarch's village) and "at least" as the tributary chief of his mountain clans. On the other hand, Cuinet noted in 1891 that the patriarch in Hakkari, like all the other patriarchs of the empire, received a firman of investitute from the sultan.[94] Fortescue in 1913 confirmed Cuinet; he wrote that he had seen a photograph of Mar Shamun's firman from the Porte.[95]

In spite of their vague legal status, the Nestorians of Hakkari enjoyed under their patriarch greater freedom than any other Christian community. "In the case of the Nestorians," wrote H.C. Luke, "the millet system attained its fullest expression."[96] Of all the "millet heads" of the Ottoman Empire, the choice of the Nestorian patriarch alone was not subject to the sultan's approval, for it was hereditary in the Mar Shamun family. The patriarch derived his authority from three main sources: (1) The unwritten common law based on custom; (2) The love and obedience of his followers—the patriarch was the only person the people would obey willingly and loyally; and (3) The strategic and geographic position that the Nestorians occupied far away from the capital. "Among the Nestorians," wrote Steen de Jehay, "tradition takes the place of legislation. From the juridical point of view the customs governing the Nestorians may be regarded as having the tacit sanction of the sovereign."[97]

The "mountain" Nestorians, nominally under the jurisdiction of the Kurdish chiefs of the Hakkari tribe, lived in their mountain fastnesses "feared and respected" by their neighbors until the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Early in that century, Rich had

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[91] Steen de Jehay, pp. 31–32.
[92] Silbernagl, p. 249.
[93] W.A. Wigram, *The Assyrians and their Neighbours* (London, 1929), p. 170.
[94] Vital Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie, Geographie administrative* (Paris, 1891), p. 652.
[95] Fortescue, p. 129 n. 5.
[96] H.C. Luke, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London, 1936), p. 8.
[97] Steen de Jehay, p. 32.

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observed that Ottoman Nestorians were the only Christians in the East that he knew who had maintained their independence against the Muslims to whom "they have rendered themselves very formidable."[98] They are usually reported as a bold and hardy people who never paid tribute to anyone but their own patriarch.[99]

This sort of "independence," however, could continue only so long as the central government remained powerless in its distant provinces. Early in the nineteenth century the "reforming" Sultans, starting with Mahmud II, were becoming increasingly interested in their eastern territories. There was a tendency on the part of the Sublime Porte to limit as far as possible the privileged jurisdiction of the semi-independent communities such as the Nestorians and their Kurdish neighbors. This the Ottoman government was able to accomplish, as we shall see, during the second half of the nineteenth century but not until several external forces had come to disturb the peace and the comparatively good relations that existed between the Kurds and Nestorians.

Largely because of the great number of non-Muslim communities that have lived among them, the Kurds have always been liberal toward followers of other religions and sects. Not only were the Christians of several denominations represented in Kurdistan, such as Nestorians, Armenians, and Jacobites, but also Jews, Shi'ahs, and Yazidis. Of the Christians, the Kurds had the closest relations with the Nestorians;[100] when a Kurd adopted Christianity, it was to the Nestorian Church that he usually turned.[101] In the nineteenth century there existed Christian villages in Kurdistan whose inhabitants spoke only Kurdish, and there were Muslim Kurdish tribes that remembered when they were once Christians. It would be more correct to say that relations between Nestorians and Kurds were little affected by religion. The interests of the tribe came first and alliances between Kurdish and Christian tribes were concluded for joint action against coreligionists. The Nestorian patriarch was a well-known arbiter of disputes among Kurdish tribes, and Nestorians

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[98] Rich, II, 121. See also F.R. Chesney, *The Expedition for the Survey of the Rivers Euphrates and Tigris* (London, 1850), I, 121.

[99] *Missionary Herald*, 33 (1837), 58.

[100] For more on Christian-Kurdish relations, see below, pp. 72–85 and *passim*. Consult also the author's *Muslim-Christian Relations*, pp. 18–30.

[101] G.R. Driver, "The Religion of the Kurds," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 2 (1922), 197.

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would often seek the good offices of a Kurdish Agha such as the Shaykh of Barzan.[102]

Persian Nestorians

Christians, in common with their Muslim neighbors, suffered from the shortcomings of a social system based on feudalism. In Persia the landlords and masters of the villages were principally, as today, members of the Turkish-speaking Afshar tribe.[103] They were responsible to the government for the collection of taxes, paid either in money or kind, for which every village was assessed. Each Nestorian village had its headman, a Christian, who was its tax-gatherer as well as spokesman; generally, next to the parish priest, he received great honor from his fellow villagers. He was the intermediary between the villagers and their landlord, who while himself oppressive to his people, did not allow any one else to harm them if possible. Indeed, he protected his serfs against all outsiders, whether the latter were right or wrong.

Despite lawless extortions and oppression from their landlords, the Nestorians of Urmiyah, an agricultural people, seem to have lived comparatively well. Unlike the rugged mountains of Hakkari, the fertile plain of Urmiyah yielded abundantly. We read that the industrious among the people were "always" surrounded with liberal plenty.[104] From their favorable physical and human environment, the Urmiyans also acquired certain qualities which distinguished them from their brethren across the frontier in Kurdistan. "By the side of their rude countrymen from the mountains," wrote Justin Perkins, the Nestorians of Urmiyah "appear like antipodes," partaking much in their manner of the suavity and urbanity of the Persian character. Interestingly, Edward L. Cutts, a representative of the Anglican

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[102] B. Nikitine, "Nestorians," in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (old edition).

[103] The migrations from Central Asia, between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries A.D., which carried Turkish-speaking tribes to the Caucasus and Anatolia, also deposited them in the provinces of Persia, especially the most northwesterly province, Azerbayjan. These Turkish-speaking Persians have no Turkish national consciousness. They are Shiah, like the Persians. They read and write the Persian language; Tabriz, the capital of Azerbayjan, has been the center of the Persian nationalist movement.

[104] Perkins, p. 10; Maclean-Browne, p. 66; cf. Southgate, II, 302

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Church who visited the mountain Nestorians about forty years after Perkins, was much impressed by them. He spoke of their frank courteous manner, finding them "naturally intelligent, affectionate, with a strong love of their country and their religion," and abundantly worthy of any help that England might give them.[105]

Ecclesiastically, the "East Syrians" of Persia were under the jurisdiction of Mar Shamun in Hakkari, an authority that they had accepted in the seventeenth century when the patriarchs lived in Azerbayjan. The patriarch received contributions from them and these depended on the voluntary liberality of the flock. A common social and physical environment made the Nestorians scarcely distinguishable from the Muslim neighbors who were interspersed among but not intermingled with them. Differences in religion brought out contrasts in some customs and traditions: the different religious communities had distinctive ways of celebrating holidays; they conducted their marriage ceremonies and funeral services differently; they fasted and worshipped differently. But the uniformity of custom in regard to dwelling, dress, food, etiquette, industry, amusement, and superstition tended to overrule most of the divergencies. The line of cleavage was religious, but the gap did not become abysmal, as we shall see, until the nineteenth century, when the East and West came into closer contact.

[105] Edward L. Cutts, *The Assyrian Christians. Report of a journey, undertaken by decision of his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury and his Grace the Archbishop of York to the Christians in Koordistan and Oroomiah* (London, 1877).

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CHAPTER THREE

MISSIONARIES, KURDS, AND CHRISTIANS

The Rise of Missions

The "evangelical awakening" of the eighteenth century in Great Britain and the quickening of religious life in Protestant circles in that country and in America gave rise in the nineteenth century to the greatest missionary movement in the history of the Christian Church since apostolic times. At the very opening of the century (1799) the Church Missionary Society of London was established, followed in 1804 by the British and Foreign Bible Society. In the United States the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the principal missionary agency during the first half of the century, was organized in 1810.

In the field of "foreign Gospel conquest" the Roman Catholic Church had started a few centuries ahead of the Protestant churches. As we have seen, the Catholic missionaries were able to encourage a schism within the Nestorian Church as early as the sixteenth century, and they had established contacts with other Eastern Christians three centuries prior to that. The great maritime discoveries of the fifteenth century energized the Church of Rome and revived its apostollic traditions. Soon the necessity was felt to carry the tidings of the "true" faith to the four corners of the earth. The Lutheran Reformation, which soon followed the geographical discoveries, also served as a stimulus to the Catholic missionary enterprise. There were new territories to conquer and to make up for those lost to the Faith in Europe. To help matters, the avenues of the foreign mission fields and the means of trade and transportation during the age of the Reformation were entirely in the hands of Catholic emperors and princes; Portugal and Spain were the mistresses of the sea.

During this early period Protestant denominations were interested in building up their churches from within, busy with the settlement of the violent controversies that were the inevitable result of the enfranchisement of individual opinion. Later, when Protestant powers had secured colonial possessions of their own and had control

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over the seaways that led to them, Protestant churches slowly started to join the foreign missionary crusade but the effort was sporadic prior to the 1800s. "To spread abroad the knowledge of the Gospel amongst barbarous and heathen nations," read a resolution of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1796, "seems to be highly preposterous." To propagate religious knowledge abroad would be "improper and absurd" as long as there remained at home a single individual without it.

Starting with the nineteenth century, however, as European colonies multiplied and commercial markets increased, the missionary call of an open world for which they felt responsible came to Protestantism with an irresistible force. Indeed, the revival of the religious life of Protestant Europe and America in the last century was intimately associated with the new economic and imperial movements of the West. Then down through the nineteenth century the Christian missionary movement expanded in financial resources and in personnel until it had spread throughout the habitable globe. In faraway places and among the exotic peoples of the world—the scattered sections of China, the cities of India, the villages of Lebanon, the jungles and deserts of Africa, among the peasants, the cannibals, the whirling dervishes—at least one member of the great army of Christian missions could be found.

Thanks to the Industrial Revolution, communication and travel were no longer an obstacle. To the missions this seemed a providence from heaven. As one of the secretaries of the American Board put it at the semi-centennial of that organization, little did their pious fathers imagine "how soon the world would be explored and its condition made known to God's people; how soon the intolerant secular power of idolatry would be overthrown in India; how soon the gates of China would be forced open; how soon Protestant governments, then all indifferent and some even hostile to missions, would find it for their interest, as they have, to act the part of protectors . . . and how soon the current of all rivers and the storms of all the oceans would be overcome by steam, and commerce fill and pervade every sea, thus giving to the people of God a free and easy access to every land."[1]

[1] D.L. Leonard, "One Hundred Years of Missionary Expansion," *Missionary Review*, 19 (1906), 758–760. See also Hans-Jochen Margull, "The Awakening of Protestant Missions," *The Student World*, 53 (1960), 137–148; D.H.-W. Genischen, "Were the

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Nestorians Rediscovered

The first two missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions arrived in the Middle East only ten years after that Board was organized. They arrived at Smyrna (modern Izmir), and there established the first American missionary station in the Ottoman Empire. Three years later work was started in Beirut, and in 1831 the station at Istanbul was established. By the end of the nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire was well covered. "It may be truly said," wrote the editors of a work on missions, "that there is scarcely a village, except in the mountains of Kurdistan and some parts of Mesopotamia and Syria bordering on Arabia, that does not have at least occasionally the opportunity to hear the Gospel."[2] In the Muslim world the Nestorians were given a prominent place on the American Board's missionary agenda even though practically nothing had been known about them in the Protestant West until the twenties of the last century. Early in that decade the Rev. Dr. Robert Walsh, Chaplain of the British Embassy at Constantinople, had collected and published some notes on these people. A summary of his statements "went the rounds of the American newspapers" and was reproduced at length in *The Missionary Herald* in 1826. Soon the missionaries in the area were notified and two of their distinguished members, Eli Smith and H.G.O. Dwight, who were then engaged in surveying Asia Minor and Armenia, were instructed to visit the Nestorians. Their letter of instruction stated that a "company of wandering shepherds will present themselves to your attention in Koordistan . . . A hundred thousand of the Koords are said to be Nestorians, subject to hereditary patriarchs."[3] Smith and Dwight were also informed to look for the numerous and independent sect of Christians called Chaldeans, not knowing that these same people had just been referred to as Kurds.

Smith and Dwight reached the Nestorians of Persian Azerbayjan in 1831. They directed the attention of the Board to this segment of the community largely because they were more accessible. They wrote about the extreme liberality of the Nestorians toward other

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Reformers Indifferent to Missions?" *ibid.*, pp. 119–127; Ramon Sugranyes de Franch, "The Springtime of Missions in the Thirteenth Century," *ibid.*, pp. 70–81.

[2] H.O. Dwight, *et al., The Encyclopedia of Missions* (New York, 1904), p. 7555.

[3] *Missionary Herald*, 26 (1830), 75. See details on these early contacts in England, see Coakley, p. 18.

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sects, their ideas of open communion, and their rejection of auricular confession—"that efficient police system of the other old churches." The two apostles from New England were firmly convinced that a mission to the Nestorians would meet with far fewer obstacles than among any other of the old churches. They wrote that the week they passed with the Urmiyah Nestorians was among the most intensely interesting in their lives. "For myself," wrote Smith, "I felt a stronger desire to settle among them at once as a missionary than among any people I have ever seen."[4] The country itself was attractive; Urmiyah to them seemed altogether the finest, the most densely populated and highly cultivated tract they had seen in Asia.[5]

Another factor that made the Nestorians themselves attractive was the missionary character that they had once borne. Located as they were among the Persians, Kurds, and Arabs, they would make ideal missionaries if educated and supported. Smith wrote that the missionary who should come to the Nestorians would feel the advantage of his position; he would feel that "he had found a prop upon which to rest the lever that will overturn the whole system of Mohammedan delusion, in the center of which he has fixed himself; that he is lighting a fire which will shine upon the corruption of the Persian on the one side, and upon the barbarities of the Kurd on the other, until all shall come to be enlightened by its brightness; and the triumph of faith will crown his labor of love."[6]

On the basis of this glowing report a mission was sent to Urmiyah in 1834 to reside among the Nestorians there. It was commenced with the expectation that the revival of gospel light and influence among the Nestorians "would rekindle their ancient missionary spirit." The head of the mission, Justin Perkins, a tutor in Amherst College, who was to live and labor in Urmiyah for thirty-six years, was told by the Secretary of the Board that his main object would be to enable the Nestorian Church, through the grace of God, to exert a commanding influence in the "spiritual regeneration of Asia."[7]

These early pioneers of the Gospel were men with a burning zeal, dominated by a sense of urgency. Christianity to them was the God-

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[4] J.P. Thompson, *Memoirs of the Rev. David Tappan Stoddard* (New York, 1858), pp. 98–99.
[5] Eli Smith, *Researches of the Rev. E. Smith and the Rev. H.G.O. Dwight in Armenia* (Boston, 1833), II, 234.
[6] R.E. Speer and R. Carter, *Report on India and Persia* (New York, 1922), pp. 383–384.
[7] Justin Perkins, pp. 28–32.

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given religion, all other faiths "the delusion of satan" and his handiwork. Justin Perkins agreed with Smith on the strategic location of Urmiyah. "What position," he wondered, "could be more important and advantageous, in its bearing on the conversion of the world, for a Christian church to hold, than that occupied by the Nestorians, situated as they are, in the centre of Mohammedan domain, and far towards the centre of benighted Asia!" He looked forward to the day when "this ancient church, once so renowned for its missionary efforts," would "again awake from the slumber of ages, and become clear as the sun, fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners, to achieve victories for Zion."[8]

The Nestorians were equally enthusiastic in their welcome of the foreign missionaries whose aid and sympathy they thought would deliver them from their oppression and insecurity. Smith and Dwight gained the impression that the hope that "we would free them from their oppressions was uppermost in their minds."[9] Even the Sunni Kurds oppressed by the Shiah Persians, were happy to see the two Americans. Taking them for Russians, an old Kurdish shepherd had cried out, "Aha! you are just the men I have been waiting to see for a long time. Our government here oppresses, beats and kills us. This is Kurdistan; the Kurds are many and the Kuzul-bashes (Persians) are few. When are you coming to take the country and allow us a chance to beat and kill them?"[10] Unfortunately for the evangelists, they had arrived at a difficult time for their spiritual campaign. The Russo-Persian conflict had already intensified Christian-Muslim animosities. Gradually through the nineteenth century, these out-of-the-way places, where the Nestorians had found refuge for the last five centuries or more, were to become a hornets' nest, disturbed by the political and cultural imperialism of the "Christian" powers.

Religion and Politics

It was in the early eighteenth century when Russia had undertaken the penetration of Transcaucasia. Peter the Great had fought and defeated Persia in 1724 and received Baku, among other provinces.

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[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.
[9] Eli Smith, II, 245.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 234.

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Throughout the nineteenth century, starting from 1801, when Tsar Paul transformed Georgia into one of his provinces, Russia missed no opportunity, either in time of peace or war, of increasing her possessions at the expense of Persia. In 1828, only three years before the arrival of Smith and Dwight, Urmiyah had been occupied for several months by Russian troops. The Treaty of Turkmanchai, which ended the war, gave to Russia all Azerbayjan north of the River Araks,[11] which remained the frontier between the two countries until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s; it continues to be the border between Persia and the former Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbayjan—to the north of the Persian province by the same name. As early as 1827 a British observer had noted that the line had been passed which separated Persia from Europe; he was fully assured that Russia could continue to encroach upon the weaker countries which lay on her frontier in Asia unless some equal power were opposed to her progress. The injury to Britain in India, he warned, would be "permanent and irreparable."[12]

In most of the provinces in the Caucasus that Russia conquered, Muslims had for centuries been rulers over Christians. When the role of ruler and ruled was reversed, the Christian element was favored. With their suppressed anger released, the newly-emancipated Christian serfs now domineered over their former rulers as they themselves had never been. Forced into submission, the revengeful Muslim tribesmen fought back; for years they were in a state of perpetual rebellion, suppressed by Russia with a brutality equal to, if not surpassing, any of the Persians and Turks. Russians, we read, exterminated "entire tribes, burning villages, confiscating cattle and leaving smouldering ruins in the wake of her armies."[13]

Muslim leaders tried to rekindle the religious feelings of their flocks. Using the only means that they possessed, they incited their followers to fight a holy war. Pilgrims from these countries who visited the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf—Shi'ite centers in present-day Iraq—carried with them accounts of the evils and dangers to which Muslims were exposed under the Russian yoke. The Shi'ite ayatollahs of Karbala were implored (just over 150 years before the rise

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[11] W.E.D. Allen and Paul Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields* (Cambridge, 1953), p. 20.

[12] "Persia," *Blackwood's Magazine*, 21 (1827), 162, 168.

[13] F. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia, 1917–1921* (New York, 1951), pp. 6–7.

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of Ayatollah Khumaini to power in Iran) to urge the Shah to take up arms in defense of his insulted religion. We are told that in 1827 all the ecclesiastics of Persia joined their leaders; mosques were filled with people of all classes listening to inflammatory orations of their mullahs. The Shah was threatened with curses and everlasting perdition if he failed to take up arms in the holy cause.[14]

Under these circumstances the missionaries to Urmiyah were cautioned to beware of all that might be construed as having a political bearing in their personal intercourse with the Nestorians, a tiny Christian minority surrounded by a Shi'ah majority. The suspicions and jealousies which the very presence of the American mission excited among the Muslims, and the greater oppression that resulted from those resentments had no "political bearing" so far as the missionaries were concerned. When a Nestorian bishop was "brutally bastinadoed" by the Muslims for having invited the missionaries to his village, the Christians found refuge, wrote the missionaries, in prayer and religious fellowship. Perkins noted that a Nestorian priest had tried to look up consoling passages of Scripture to comfort the beaten bishop. No matter how painful these humiliations were, to the missionaries they represented only a passing phase. Indeed, to Perkins one could not "reasonably anticipate permanent quiet in these lands until they shall yield to the dominion of the Prince of Peace."[15] That that blessed day would come, he had no doubt. The political expansion worldwide of the Christian powers was an indication to him that the Lord was "shaking down the power of the false prophet, and preparing the way for Him whose right it is to reign, in these and all other lands."[16] He was certain that the universal catastrophe of Muslim domain could not in all human probability be much longer postponed. Just as Islam "was propagated and is sustained by the sword, so its overthrow, there can be little doubt, will quickly ensue, when the sword shall be taken from its hands."[17] What was "still more affecting" to Perkins, was the "the moral degradation" of the Nestorians themselves.

As we shall soon see the time came when the missionaries did use their influence for the political betterment of their proteges, and the

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[14] *Backwood's Magazine*, p. 166; see also J. McNeill, *Progress and Present Position of Russia in the East* (London, 1836), pp. 73–80.

[15] *Missionary Herald*, 35 (1839), 250.

[16] *Ibid.*, 36 (1840), 481.

[17] Justin Perkins, p. 24.

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Persian government was usually cooperative. In the mountains of Kurdistan, however, circumstances were different. There the political situation was such that only one year after the establishment of a missionary station among the Nestorians over seven thousand of them were massacred. A correspondent of one of the London daily newspapers, in giving an account of that massacre over a hundred years ago, accused the American, Catholic, and Anglican missionaries of being the immediate cause of that outrage. Since this study is the first account of that catastrophe written with the perspective of over a century,[18] let us look at its background more closely.

Kurdistan Agitated

For over four hundred years the Kurds of the Ottoman Empire had lived a practically autonomous existence. The control of the sultans over their eastern Anatolian provinces remained nominal due to distance, rugged terrain, and lack of means of communication. No serious trouble took place between the Kurds and the Ottoman government until the centralizing policy of Sultan Mahmud II (d. 1839) began to antagonize the feudal lords, leading to their insurrection. Badr Khan, the Chief of Buhtan, threatened by the sultan's reforms, revolted. Conflict between him and the Porte broke out in the mid-1830s and lasted intermittently for the next decade. By 1840, when the American missionaries arrived on the scene, Badr Khan, in alliance with the Kurdish chiefs of the neighboring provinces, had set up an almost independent Kurdish confederacy under his own rule. At this time the Ottoman army, recently weakened by liquidation of the Janissaries, was threatened with invasion by the Egyptian army of Muhammad Ali. Thus for a brief period Badr Khan was able to extend his influence over an area which included Diarbakir, Sulaymaniyah, and Sauj Bulaq (Mahabad). He struck his own coins, had a munition factory, and his name was mentioned in Friday prayers. His rule is said to have been just and peaceful. Two American missionaries who visited him before his downfall reported that under

[18] Rev. George Badger, the Anglican missionary involved, has tried to exonerate himself of this charge in his excellent work on the Nestorians, quoted above, while Thomas Laurie in his book, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians* (Boston, 1856) wrote in behalf of Dr. Grant.

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his government the guilty found no escape and that bribery and favoritism were unknown there. Those who knew the Khan have reported that he aimed at nothing less than entire independence from the sultan and the union of all Kurdistan under his single sway.[19]

The Nestorians of southeastern Anatolia lived under the nominal jurisdiction of the Kurdish Amir of Hakkari, who in turn owed a nominal allegiance to the Turkish Pasha of Erzerum. The "independent" Nestorian tribes were given a voice in the councils of the Hakkari tribes on condition that they supply a contingent of armed men in times of crisis. Four years after the American missionaries arrived in Urmiyah, Dr. Asahel Grant, a missionary physician, endeavored to establish friendly relations with the Nestorians of central Kurdistan, where the Nestorian patriarch resided, not far from the Persian border, in Ottoman territory. Grant was the third known Westerner since Tavernier (d. 1689) to enter these rugged mountains; Schultz, the man who preceded Grant there, was suspected as a spy and was murdered by the Hakkari chief a few years before Grant's arrival.

When Grant visited the mountain Nestorians in the fall of 1839 he found two chiefs ruling the Kurdish Hakkari tribes: Nurallah, the Amir of Hakkari, who resided at Bashqala (Bash Qal'ah), and Sulayman Bey, Nurallah's nephew—whom Grant called "the second chief of Hakkari tribes"; he lived at Julamark. Nurallah, an ambitious man of superior ability, had succeeded his brother, father of Sulayman, usurping the right of hereditary succession which under ordinary circumstances would have gone to Sulayman. The office of the Amir of Hakkari was hereditary in one family but the choice of

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[19] Consult J.J. Hellert, *Histoire de l'Empire Ottoman*, IV (Paris, 1836), 253–260; H.F.B. Lynch, *Armenia, Travels and Studies* (London, 1901), II, 421; "The Azizan or the Princes of Bhotan, *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, 36 (1949), 249–251; M.A. Zaki, *Khulāsat Ta'rīkh al-Kurd wa-Kurdistān min Aqdam al-'Uṣūr al-Ta'rīkhīyah ḥatta al-'Ān* (Cairo, 1939), p. 250; "Visit of Messrs. Wright and Breath to Badr Kan Bey," *Missionary Herald*, 42 (1846), 381; R. Anderson, I, 334–335; Laurie, *Dr. Grant, p. 105; James Brant, "Notes . . . Communicated by Viscount Palmerston,"* The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, 10 (1840), 358, 361; *Social Science Abstracts*, II (1930), no. 11472; Badger, I, 266, 370; Abraham Yohannan, *The Death of a Nation* (New York, 1916), pp. 111–112. For details on the Kurdish question as discussed in this and the following chapters consult Wadie Jwaideh, "The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Its Origins and Development," Ph.D. dissertation, Syracuse University, 1960. This is a massive study of 895 pages which this writer scanned after his own work had gone to the press.

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the individual who assumed the office belonged to the tribes in whose councils the Nestorians were represented.

The matter of succession had caused a certain amount of jealousy between the two Kurdish factions. The Nestorian tribes themselves were divided in their allegiance depending on whether they lived under the authority of one or the other of the two Kurdish chiefs. The patriarch himself had been a personal friend of the late amir, father of Sulayman; that friendship was now transferred to the son—a fact which increased Nurallah's mistrust of the Nestorian Patriarch.

Missionary Encouragement

In 1836 Perkins had written the Nestorian primate of the "trials and sufferings . . . you and your people have so long endured in these lands of Mohammedan oppression" and spoke of the deep interest and sympathy which Christians in America felt for the patriarch's people. Three years later, Grant visited the patriarch, who kept him as his guest for five weeks. Besides the thrill of his missionary labors here, Grant's research and reading of the early church history in northern Mesopotamia and Persia had convinced him that he had found the lost tribes of Israel; he would soon publish an interesting book on the subject entitled *Nestorians; Or The Lost Tribes.*[20]

After his visit to the patriarch Grant wrote to the Board in Boston that he had spent the two most interesting months of his life among the mountain Nestorians. He reported that he had kindled "a new hope in their bosoms" as he had spoken in their councils of the possibility of their branches spreading "over all these lands." They "eagerly drank the encouragements I presented" to put forth untiring efforts and prayers for a return "of the golden days when their churches and schools would spread throughout Asia." His "soul fired," he urged the Board that "we must without fear enter their mountain fastnesses, pour the light of the life around their pathways, arouse and direct their dormant or perverted energies, and under the Captain of our Salvation lead them forth to conquest and to victory." On his way back to Urmiyah, Grant had visited Nurallah, who was sick. The doctor cured him and the two became friends;

[20] For details, see above, pp. 36–37.

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at least Dr. Grant so thought at this time.[21] The following summer (1840) Grant visited the patriarch again. He found him at Julamark, a guest of his friend Sulayman Bey. The two men urged Grant to return to the mountains soon. More than ever, Grant was convinced of the importance of a mission station to these lost tribes of Israel.

Soon after Grant had left Julamark, on his way to the United States, the Nestorial patriarch had two other visitors, one of them from England. William F. Ainsworth and Christian Rassam were sent on an expedition jointly sponsored by the British Geographical Society and the Society for Promotion of Christian Knowledge to make inquiries concerning Kurdistan and its people and to look into the moral and religious condition of the "Christians in Coordistan." It is interesting to observe that when Ainsworth and Rassam visited Julamark, not more than three weeks after Grant had left it, they found the Nestorian patriarch alone, serving as acting-governor in place of Sulayman, who had gone to Bashqala to meet, we are told, a Turkish envoy there. Mistaking Sulayman for Nurallah, Ainsworth would write later that the Amir of Hakkari [Nurallah] and Mar Shamun were on excellent terms until the arrival of the American missionary-physician Dr. Asahel Grant.[22]

After Grant had left Sulayman and the patriarch, he had proceeded to Bashqala and from there on to Van, where he met Nurallah. The Amir had just returned from Erzerum where he had bartered his independence for an appointment from his Ottoman superior, deeming it wise to make such voluntary overtures as would strengthen his hold as the immediate head of the Hakkari tribes.[23] Writing at the time, his impressions not colored by subsequent events, Grant thought that the Amir's move would open the way for the mission because the country would then be placed under a responsible government,[24] not suspecting that it might also be a plan against his very own activity in the mountains.[25]

The Kurds must have felt threatened by the Frankish influence that the Nestorians seemed to be inviting in central Kurdistan. An

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[21] For Dr. Grant's account of his visit see *Missionary Herald*, 36 (1840), 305–306.

[22] Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches*, p. 245. For the same erroneous impression, see also H.J. Ross, *Letters from the East*, ed. J. Ross (London, 1902), pp. 64–65.

[23] Grant, *Nestorians*, p. 127.

[24] *Missionary Herald*, 36 (1840), 432.

[25] *Ibid.*, 38 (1842), 496; cf. Laurie, *Dr. Grant*, pp. 104–105; Badger, I, 262–264; Ross, pp. 64–65.

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incident that Ainsworth narrates well illustrates how the Muslim Kurds perceived Western presence among their Christian clients. On the outskirts of Julamark a Kurdish chief had asked the Englishman: "What do you do here; are you not aware that Franks are not allowed in this country? No dissimulation! I must know who you are, and what is your business . . . You are the forerunners of those who come to take this country . . ."[26] The Nestorian Christians, on the other hand, did not make a secret of their new ties of friendship with the Franks; they had even became haughty as a result of their newly-found friends. When the Kurdish agha, quoted above, had asked who had brought the visiting Franks there, their Nestorian guide had answered "I," laying his hand upon his breast "in an undaunted manner."

Nestorians and Missions Suspected

Strengthened by his alliance with the Pasha of Erzerum, Nurallah began to assert his full authority as the feudal lord of Hakkari. Soon after his return from Erzerum he offered peace to the Nestorian patriarch on condition that he lay aside all claims to civil authority and settle down as spiritual head of the Church; that he leave political matters to the tribal chiefs (Maliks) and to the Amir himself. Many of the Nestorian maliks sided with the Amir accusing their primate of overreaching his power.[27]

This was the situation when Grant visited the Kurdistan Nestorians again a year later (July 1841). He wrote to the Board that there were "some petty feuds between sections of the Nestorians and the Koords" and that the alliance between the Amir and the Turks was assuming something of the appearance of a hostile attitude. Grant did not think that there would be any serious attempt to invade the Nestorian country "at present." During this trip Grant visited the Patriarch and Sulayman but not Nurallah. With the patriarch's brother he toured the Nestorian villages speaking of the benefits that they might hope to gain as a result of missionary labors among them. He apparently had in mind only religious reforms; he was annoyed

[26] Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches*, I, 242.
[27] Laurie, *Dr. Grant*, p. 344; *Missionary Herald*, 38 (1842), 259.

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by the patriarch's brother who had spoken of "benefits of a temporal nature." Grant saw no connection between the two;[28] he looked forward to the unlimited work ahead and asked the Board for more men, pleading in behalf of the "perishing millions by whom we are surrounded."

Soon after Grant had departed for Mosul, Nurallah began his effort to subjugate the Nestorians. In a show of strength he sent a party that attacked and burned the residence of the patriarch. Unable to maintain authority among his people, the patriarch had fled to a tribe loyal to him. To Grant, who heard of these incidents while at Mosul, what had taken place were merely temporary disturbances which would make the Nestorians more receptive to the word of God. "In their affliction," he quoted Hosea 5:15, "they will seek me early." He brought to the attention of the Board the true "enemy" of the Nestorians: the Catholic missionaries. These "enemies of truth," he warned, "stand ready to penetrate the Nestorian country the moment the existing obstacles are removed." It was, therefore, necessary to do "all in our power to prepare [the Nestorians] for the approaching conflict with the powers of darkness." He assured the Board that there was no occasion for discouragement, none for delay, "but much for hope, much for haste."[29]

The next time Grant returned to Hakkari was a year later (1842). He wrote that he found Nurallah and Sulayman very friendly with each other and with him. Not suspecting any evil, Grant had "the most free conversations" with them regarding his objects and plans. He had spoken to the two Kurdish chiefs of introducing associates, building houses, and establishing schools in the midst of the Nestorian territory. "Our character and objects had become so well known to them, that they appeared not to entertain a shade of suspicion."[30] He made partial arrangement for establishing two stations, one at the largest Nestorian village of Ashitha, and for two other stations to be started as soon as men could be found to occupy them. He did not deem it necessary to obtain a formal permission from the Turkish government to build or reside here in these remote regions of the Ottoman empire because the Nestorians "have never acknowledged

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[28] *Missionary Herald*, 38 (1842), 218, 259–260.
[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 90, 201.
[30] *Ibid.*, 38 (1842), 496; 39 (1843), 67.

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any allegiance to the Porte nor paid taxes of any description to the Turkish government."[31]

Intrigues

One of the reasons why Grant was permitted to enter the Nestorian country was because the Kurds were planning a campaign against Muhammad Pasha of Mosul, the Ottoman agent responsible for the subjugation of Kurds.[32] Ismail Pasha, the Kurdish hereditary Chief of Amadiyah (in present-day Iraqi Kurdistan), was able to retake his city from Muhammad Pasha in the summer of 1842. When Muhammad Pasha besieged it, Ismail enlisted the help of his fellow Kurds, including Badr Khan and Nurallah, against the Turks; he also wanted the Nestorian patriarch to join them. Some Nestorian tribes did join Ismail but the Patriarch refused; he even forwarded an account of the Kurdish confederacy to the Pasha in Mosul, disclaiming any participation in an insurrection aimed against the Ottoman government.[33] The Pasha, in a series of letters, promised help to the patriarch, in case of an invasion of his territory by the Kurds; he had long been yearning to have a finger in the politics of central Kurdistan.

To the patriarch the Kurdish movement meant a bid for Kurdish over Turkish supremacy; of the two he preferred Turkish rule probably with the secret hope that European powers in Istanbul would in that case interest themselves in his protection. Early that year we know that Grant had received a letter from the British Consul at Baghdad[34] to whom the American missionary had forwarded a letter from the Nestorian Patriarch asking for foreign intervention. The consul had promised to do all he could to help and had advised that the patriarch "at all events address a letter to the Queen of England and send it to me without any unnecessary publicity." Grant had notified the patriarch that his letter had been forwarded to the British Consul since he, Grant, had no political power. Presumably he had also conveyed the consul's advice to the prelate. After the

[31] Grant's letter, dated May 6, 1943, in archives of American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions; folio entitled *Mountain Nestorians, 1838–1844.*

[32] See Badger, I, 183; S.H. Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* (Oxford, 1925), pp. 285ff.

[33] Badger, I, 188, 265.

[34] For the consuls' letter, dated February 10, 1842, see folio *Mountain Nestorians, 1838–1844.*

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patriarch's house was burned, Grant was of the opinion that Mar Shamun would do well to come to good terms with the Turkish government; he had expressed that opinion to the Board but not to the Nestorians, to whom his advice had been to be in peace with both sides.[35]

While the Kurds and Turks were busy fighting, the Nestorians were temporarily forgotten and Grant was able to start building an extensive establishment at Ashitha. By the end of September he had opened a school of twenty pupils and was joined the following month by a colleague from Mosul who arrived with eight mule loads of Syriac scriptures, books, and supplies. It was during that month that the Kurdish Amadiyah expedition had ended in failure. The Kurds blamed their defeat partly on the refusal of Mar Shamun to cooperate, if not to his betrayal.[36] By this time also, rumors were spreading that Grant was building a fortress (qalʿah) in the Nestorian country. Layard, a friend of the American missionaries, had seen the American houses and school a few years later. He described the station as standing upon the summit of an isolated hill, commanding the whole valley. A position less ostentatious and proportions more modest, he wrote, might certainly have been chosen. He was surprised that the persons," so well acquainted with the tribes amongst whom they had come to reside, should have been thus indiscreet."[37] Nurallah himself was beginning to suspect Grant. He and his fellow Kurdish chiefs had for years feared the growing European influence in nearby Mosul, often used in behalf of the Christians.[38] While still claiming friendship to Grant, Nurallah proceeded to complain to the Pasha of Erzerum that the foreign doctor was building a strong fort in the Nestorian mountains and that he would have expelled him but preferred to await the orders of the Turkish government.[39]

The Pasha of Mosul, also uncomfortable with Western presence in Kurdistan, reported Grant's activities to Istanbul; he wrote of an "Englishman" who was raising an extraordinary edifice in the Nestorian country, measuring three hundred yards square, containing no less than two hundred and fifty rooms, with as many Nestorians engaged in completing it. The existence of a British Vice-Consul at Mosul

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[35] *Missionary Herald*, 38 (1842), 200.
[36] *Ibid.*, 39 (1843), 67.
[37] Layard, *Nineveh*, pp. 156–157.
[38] *Missionary Herald*, 39 (1843), 318; Laurie, *Dr. Grant*, pp. 190, 244, 262, 275.
[39] Laurie, *Dr. Grant*, p. 287.

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had long acted as a restraint upon the Pasha's ambitions and his proceedings generally; he "could not brook the idea," wrote Grant, that foreigners should have the opportunity of acting as spies or reporting upon his projected rule in central Kurdistan.[40] The Ottoman governor of Mosul had even ordered Grant's assassination but the evangelist-physician, trusting God, attached no importance to these reports, scarcely doubting that all would pass harmlessly away. To him the "wild reports of my building castles" originated in a "jealousy indulged by surrounding Koords of the influence of foreign Christians." He assured the Board that even if the Turkish government interfered with his work, "I have taken suitable measures to counteract."[41]

But things unforeseen were to happen that winter. While Grant was at Mosul, a missionary from the Church of England, George P. Badger, made his way to the remote Nestorian patriarchal village through the deep snows of February, perhaps to take advantage of Dr. Grant's absence from the rugged mountains. As a result of Aisnworth's expedition of 1839–1840, noted above, the Archbishop of Canterbury, with the assistance of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, had sent a mission to begin work among the mountain Nestorians. When Ainsworth had visited the Patriarch in 1840, he (the patriarch) was told that the American missionaries were among the zealous Christians who seemed to read the Bible not to receive increased wisdom and holiness but in order to invent new doctrines and to rebel against the Church; they had "seceded from the Church of England and have corrupted the doctrines of Christianity."[42] As a result of that visit, the Nestorian primate had expressed the desire to enter into correspondence with the Church of England.

After the turmoil of the two years that followed Ainsworth's visit, the Patriarch must have been especially pleased with the arrival of George P. Badger. As citizen of the superpower of the day, Badger was not timid as Grant had been in discussing political matters with the Nestorian patriarch. One of the many letters of introduction that Badger had brought with him (dated August 15, 1842) opened with these words: "It is one of the pleasing signs of the times in which

[40] Badger, I, 187–188.
[41] *Missionary Herald*, 39 (1843), 319.
[42] Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches*, I 248–249.

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we are privileged to live, that a desire is felt in the different Apostolic churches of Christ to hold out to each other the right hand of fellowship, and to endeavor by word and deed to promote each other's temporal and eternal welfare." The first point to which Badger was to direct his attention was to testify to the good will of the Church of England toward the Eastern Christians and "the desire which is felt in England to see their Churches restored to a flourishing condition as branches of the True Vine."[43]

The jealousies and quarrels that the missionaries were perhaps unwittingly fanning would turn into a massacre only five months after Badger's arrival. Just as Grant had warned the Nestorians against the Roman Catholic missionaries and their Church, so now Badger disparaged the "American dissenters." He advised Mar Shamun against cooperation with them. "I did not fail to acquaint the patriarch how far we are removed from them in doctrine and discipline," Badger admits in his book. "I showed him, moreover, that it would be injudicious, and by no means satisfy us, to have schools among his people by the side of theirs and pressed upon him to decide what plan he would pursue under existing circumstances."[44] Unlike Grant, Badger had satisfied the patriarch by discussing with him the possibility of doing something "in a political sense." In his report to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Badger wrote that "Nurallah Beg, the Coordish Emeer of Hakkari, has virtually robbed [the Nestorians] of their independence, and unless timely assistance be rendered to the Christian population, we may soon expect to see them entirely subjugated by the barbarous and lawless Coords . . ."[45]

While Badger was with the patriarch, two Kurdish messengers, perhaps spies, had brought a letter from Nurallah in which he asked Mar Shamun to appoint a place where the two chiefs might meet and confer on their differences. The brother of the patriarch had spoken to the messengers first, saying that his people would have nothing to do with Nurallah; that the land of Hakkari belonged to neither the Kurds nor the Nestorians, but "to these," pointing at Badger who was carrying a Turkish fez with him.[46] The patriarch, unlike his brother, had shown great respect to Nurallah's messengers,

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[43] Badger, I, xiv–xviii.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 248.

[45] *Ibid.*

[46] Badger would write unconvincingly later that by "these" the patriarch's brother meant the Turks, whose headgear was the fez. The American missionaries, who

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rising upon the receipt of the Amir's letter; but he declined politely Nurallahs invitation, using the weather, his religious duties, and the presence of his guest as the reasons why he could not meet the chief. The version of one of the messengers of the incident, as related to an American missionary, was that when he delivered his message Badger recommended that "the Patriarch not to seek the friendship of the Kurds, but to apply for aid, if he needed it, to England, which was able and willing to grant him the fullest protection . . ."[47] A German traveler has also reported that the Kurdish emissaries attributed the patriarch's refusal to negotiate to Badger, who was believed to have advised the patriarch "to apply to England" for help.[48] Grant, who returned to the mountains two months after Badger had left them, has recorded that Badger had advised Mar Shamun to seek the help of the Porte where a friendly Christian power would back him against the rebellious Kurds.

After Badger's departure, we find Nurallah earnestly cultivating the friendship and alliance of fellow Kurdish chiefs, especially those with a grudge against the Nestorians, such as Ismail Pasha of Amadiyaha and Badr Khan of Buhtan. The latter was especially concerned with the threat that the independent Christians now represented; he was infuriated by the Patriarch's communication with the Pasha of Mosul. Well versed in Turkish intrigues, it was Badr Khan's turn to collaborate with the Pasha of Mosul. He asked for his permission to subjugate the mountain Christians. Permission was granted; what an opportunity to have the Kurds and the mountain Nestorians destroy each other and pave the way for the extension of Turkish authority over them both.

Grant's "Neutrality"

Just before the Nestorians were attacked in 1843 Dr. Grant had visited Badr Khan for professional reasons and there he found his old friend Nurallah. Before Grant's departure from Ashitha Nestorians

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had heard the Kurdish version of the incident, reported that by "these" was meant the English. See Coakley, pp. 40–41, 372–373n.80, where, interestingly, one of the people who "vigorously" defended Badger in the role that he might have played in the 1843 catastrophe is "Grant himself."

[47] Laurie, *Dr. Grant*, pp. 285–286.

[48] C. Sandreczki, *Reise nach Mosul und durch Kurdistan nach Urmia* (Stuttgart, 1857), III, 71.

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by the hundreds had come kissing his hand, hoping that as a result of his visit to the Khan there might be some hope of security for them. Grant, true to his principle of noninterference in local politics, would promise no such thing; he found it strange when these poor and frightened people could see no "inconsistency in an ambassador for Christ taking part in the passing political events."[49] When he had arrived at Badr Khan's camp he was first met by Nurallah who, wrote Grant, "at first manifested some solicitude lest I had come to frustrate his plans by negotiating terms of peace for the Patriarch. Being satisfied that I had no political motives, he introduced me to the Buhtan chief as his friend . . ." Grant spent ten days with the Kurdish chiefs and witnessed the preparations that were being made for the invasion of the Nestorian country. The two chiefs had spoken "as freely to me on the subject as though I had been one of their own number." Grant was relieved, however, by Badr Khan's assurance that "our house and property should remain entirely safe" and that all "Nestorians who might take shelter with me should remain unmolested." Grant's reply regarding asylum for the Nestorians was that he would tell them about it "but I could not advise them regarding its acceptance or rejection." The Kurdish chiefs had thought the doctor "overscrupulous about noninterference" but he had assured them that missionary policy of interference did not go beyond "the protection of our persons and labors."[50] But soon after Grant departed, the Kurdish army descended upon the Nestorians. Ashitha and three other villages in that valley were spared at first perhaps because of the promise made to Grant. Nothing was spared except the missionary station which ironically was later converted into a Kurdish fortress.[51] About one-fifth of a population of some fifty thousand were estimated to have been killed when the flames of a "petty feud" were fanned into a conflagration.

Missionaries Before Judgment

Reporting the massacre, Grant concluded with this "consoling" thought: "In our own trials for that people, let us have the great

[49] Grant, "Life in Kurdistan," vol. 2. Unpublished, unpaginated manuscript at the archives of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

[50] Laurie, *Dr. Grant*, pp. 335–336; *Missionary Herald*, 39 (1943), 435.

[51] Many of the villagers spared in 1843 were also put to the sword in 1846.

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consolation that we have been instrumental, in some measure, of awakening an interest and a spirit of prayer for them." Sadly, he had also been instrumental in inspiring fallacious hopes and exciting dangerous prejudices. "A new hope seemed to kindle in their bosoms," he had written, and they "eagerly drank the encouragement I presented." In the name of noninterference in local politics, the zealous missionary, a mutual friend of the Kurdish chief and the Nestorian Patriarch, never offered his good offices to mediate their differences.

Unfortunately, Grant's mission was nothing but political in the eyes of both Kurds and Turks. As he himself admitted, a little too late, "The Turks have learnt the important secret that 'knowledge is power' and they are unwilling that this power should be imparted to the native Christians and especially to those who have too much of it already."[52] Grant built his house without permission from the Ottoman government. He knew that Nurallah had on more than one occasion laid snares for his destruction while professing to regard him as friend and physician,[53] yet he did not mention it until the massacre had taken place. Indeed even after the catastrophe of 1843, Grant had not learned any political lesson. Only two months after the Nestorian disaster he was looking forward "with special interest to that remarkable people the Yezidees . . . who may yet be seen moving forward in a body to the Gospel standard when the restraints imposed of the powers that be are removed."[54]

The Anglican mission, like the American, was certainly well-intended but no mission could have been more injudiciously conceived and carried out than Badger's. He worked on the patriarch's fears that the American missionaries would destroy his temporal as well as his spiritual authority. The patriarch started to suspect the good will of Nurallah, which Grant seemed to have gained, and was afraid, as Badger himself testified, that the Hakkari chief had granted his approval to Grant so that his building would be eventually turned into a Kurdish fortress. In an interview with the Patriarch after the storm was over, Englishman Layard found Mar Shamun more

[52] Grant, *Life in Kurdistan*, Vol. 1.
[53] *Missionary Herald*, 40 (1844), 59.
[54] Letter dated September 23, 1843 in archives of American Board of Commissioners.

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bitter against the American missionaries than against his Muslim oppressors.[55]

At the risk "of having my mental sanity called in question," Grant wrote, he wanted to continue his spiritual work after the storm was over. "We ought to stand ready to enter and labor, for a longer or shorter time, as the Lord of the vineyard may direct."[56] But he died of typhus while serving the refugees at Mosul. The Board decided to discontinue the mission in Kurdistan and to concentrate their work on the Nestorians of Urmiyah where the country was comparatively more peaceful and the people themselves more law-abiding. The Anglican mission was also withdrawn, to be resumed about forty years later.

The Nestorians of Hakkari, destitute and dejected, found a little respite when the Ottoman government, no longer threatened by Muhammad Ali, brought Badr Khan's rule to an end in 1847. By 1850 both Badr Khan and Nurallah Beg were captured and exiled; a shaky Ottoman rule over Kurdistan was established.

[55] Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon* (London, 1853), II, 424–425.
[56] Grant, "Life in Kurdistan," Vol. 2.

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CHAPTER FOUR

MISSION TO AZERBAYJAN

The Nestorians of Persia, like their brethren in Hakkari, seem to have lived comparatively quietly and inconspicuously, untroubled by the kind of religious prejudices and conflicts that were set into motion there during the early part of the nineteenth century.[1] A peaceable people, they tilled the soil just as their ancestors had done for centuries. They were scarcely distinguishable from the Persian Afshars whose Turkish dialect the Nestorians used as a second language. In some villages Azeri Turkish had even displaced Aramaic, just as Kurdish had displaced it in some Nestorian villages of Kurdistan.[2] But religion did set Christians and Muslim apart for religion and not language was the tie that linked people into social communities. Differences in religion meant differences in customs and traditions. Because religion played an important role in the life of both Muslims and Christians, religious differences set the minority and majority apart, widening social distance between them and strengthening the ethnic identity of each one of them.

Unlike their kinsmen in central Kurdistan, the Nestorians of Azerbayjan, in spite of their oppressive landlords, lived comparatively comfortably on a fertile and highly cultivated plain whose orchards, vineyards, pastures, and trees seem to have attracted the attention of travelers throughout the ages.[3] Almost all the Christians here lived in villages governed in feudal style by landlords who were generally Muslim but in a few cases Christian. The landlords engaged in petty but continued oppressions which usually meant collecting extra taxes, compelling the villagers to work gratis and, in the case

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[1] For a further discussion of the Nestorians of Persia, see above, pp. 38ff.

[2] Since Aramaic dialects were spoken by Christians and not Muslims, a switch to a "Muslim" language sometimes led to eventual conversion to Islam. In the Tur 'Abdin and Hakkari districts of south-eastern Turkey there were several Muslim villagers whose elder citizens remembered in the nineteenth century when their village was predominantly Christian. See author's *Muslim-Christian Relations*, pp. 104–105.

[3] Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-Arḍ*, ed. J.H. Kramers (2nd edn., Leiden, 1939), II, 336.

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of the Christian peasantry, occasionally carrying off their attractive women to the harem. Ordinarily, every man gave his labor for two days, or the price of it, to the landlord and each house gave him annually "two fowls, a load of manure fuel, some eggs, and a fee on the occasion of a marriage; for every she-buffalo, two shillings a year; for every cow one shilling, for every ewe or she-goat, sixpence, but all of these are free until they bear." The Christians, in addition, paid a poll tax of "three shillings," collected from every male above sixteen in lieu of military service.[4]

On the whole the arrangement was equitable and taxes moderate. In some cases, both here in Persia and the Ottoman Empire, life of Christians and Jews was easier and more secure than that of their Muslim neighbors. While the Muslims fought the battles of their shahs and sultans, the non-Muslims paid a small tax and stayed at home attending their fields or managing their peddling. When the American missionaries came they found the Christians living in circumstances "quite tolerable for a people in bondage." Perkins thought that unlike the Armenians of Anatolia, the Nestorians of Persia were not reduced to spiritless servility. He found them restless under oppression, and "remarkably independent in their feelings."[5]

On this lower strata of society even religious distinctions do not seem to have mattered much in everyday life. Through centuries of Muslim rule, with Islam both dominant and held in high regard, the Christians had lost their early religious zeal and spirit. Their churches had become ritualistic and they had long ceased to proselytize. Their Muslim neighbors likewise practiced a religion of form and ritual and sometimes found comfort praying to the Christian saints. During his first few years in Urmiyah Perkins noticed many Muslims taking their sick to Nestorian churches where they would be kept for a whole day with the expectation of being cured. He wrote that such cases were of almost an everyday occurrence, practiced by those of high rank as well as low; they would kiss the cross and the New Testament upon the altar and leave incense or some such offering in order to be favored by the patron saint with the needs they sought.

All this "superstition" and "dead form" the missionaries had come to change. As missionary Stoddard put it, "We strip off all their

[4] Maclean and Browne, p. 122.
[5] Justin Perkins, p. 17.

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righteousness, tear away all their hopes and arraign them as condemned criminals at the bar of an offended God."[6] Referring to the pilgrimage of Muslims to Christian churches, Perkins wondered how the followers of the "false prophet," not satisfied with "the endless labyrinth of follies furnished by their own dark system," eagerly resorted to those of the "nominal Christians" as well.[7] He could not understand how they could bring their sick to the same Christians whom they "despised," and ask their deacons and priests to read prayers over them.

The Persian government, unlike the Ottoman, looked with favor upon the work of the American missionaries when they first arrived. Soon after they were established, they received firmans from the Prince-Governor of Azerbayjan and the Shah himself, offering them protection. The Shah's proclamation referred to Perkins in royal Persian as "the high in station, quick of understanding; the noble; the perfection of intelligence and dignity, and the fullness of exaltation and grandeur, the greatest of Christian priests and the highest of the perfect followers of Jesus." The royal decree urged Perkins to increase his efforts with even greater zeal to teach "the science of history, geography, geometry and mathematics [among] our subjects."[8]

Under these circumstances the Americans were able to start their work in earnest despite occasional disturbances. The wrongdoers in these cases, sometimes jealous Persian officials and notables, were brought to justice, at times by order of the royal family.[9] The welfare and security of the missionaries were also looked after by British representatives in Tehran and Tabriz.

Spoken Aramaic Revived

The missionaries began their work among the Nestorians with their spoken language, the means through which the evangelists would achieve their ends. While in churches which use a second liturgical language—such as Latin among the Catholics and the classical Syriac

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[6] J.P. Thompson, p. 193.
[7] Justin Perkins, p. 380.
[8] Texts in *ibid.*, pp. 287, 387, 420.
[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 372–373, 397–398.

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among the Eastern Christians—there was little interest in the question of the folk versus standardized speech, in Protestant churches, with their concern for a more direct relationship between God and His worshipers, the dignity and importance of folk speech was greatly emphasized. It was early decided that vernacular Aramaic of the Nestorians had to be reduced to writing. Since there were several mutually unintelligible dialects of the language spoken by these Christians, the missionaries lent their aid to the standardization and diffusion of the dialect of Urmiyah, where they had settled.[10]

One of the most important findings that missionaries Smith and Dwight[11] had reported on during their exploratory trip to Azerbayjan was that the "venerable Syriac," long supposed to have been a dead language, still existed in a "corrupted form" as the living vernacular of the Nestorian Christians. A few Western scholars interested themselves in the various Aramaic dialects spoken by the Eastern Christians, but the mass of Syriac manuscripts that found their way to the British Museum and elsewhere in Europe at about this time (1843–1847) were in classical Syriac and this practically recreated studies in that field. Coincidentally, the archaeological discovery of ancient Assyrian (Akkadian) at about this same time gave rise to the study of Semitic languages in general.[12] Comparative grammar found new material in the study of living dialects while archaeology led naturally to renewed interest in the life, languages, and literatures of the Semitic people in the present.

In their study of the Nestorian vernacular, Orientalists were not able at the beginning to undertake a serious and systematic study of the various dialects because of the political and geographical difficulties then prevailing.[13] Some of their early opinions were drawn from inad-

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[10] For a detailed recent study of the American missionary effort to study and elevate the Urmiyah dialect to a written, literary language, see H.L. Murre-van den Berg, *From A spoken to a Written Language, The Introduction and Development of Literary Urmia Aramaic in the Nineteenth Century* (Leiden, 1995).

[11] For further reference to Smith and Dwight, see above pp. 67f.

[12] For further discussion of the ancient Assyrian language, see pp. 11–12, 14, 29.

[13] Some of the important studies made were: Albert Socin, *Die neu-armaeischen Dialekte von Urmia Bis Mosul* (Tubingen, 1882), where the author gives a few specimens of the Jilu, Salmas, Alqush, and Zakhu dialects besides the Urmiyah; Ignace Guidi, "Beiträge Zur Kenntnis des neu-aramäischen Fellihi-Dialektes," in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgen-ländischen Gesellschaft*, 37 (1993), 293–318; Edward Sachau, "Über die Poesie in der Volkessprache der Nestorianer," in *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich-Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, 11 (1896), 179–215; Nöldeke, *Grammatik*; Maclean, *Grammar*; David T. Stoddard, "A Grammar of the Modern Syriac

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equate data, hearsay, and guesswork; the dialects that the Nestorians spoke, for example, were not a "corrupted form" of the classical Syriac but other dialects of Aramaic like it. These Eastern Christians had for centuries used the two dialects together: one, the prestigeful literary and liturgical classical Syriac (originally the vernacular of Edessa); the other, the dialect that they spoke.

Like any other spoken language, Aramaic could not spread over a vast territory without showing local variations, especially where the tendency to localism was strong. Each one of the local dialects was naturally influenced by the local form of speech that antedated Aramaic, just as the displaced Aramaic later impregnated the Arabic language.[14] In the various Nestorian vernaculars there are words not used in classical Syriac but which are found in some older Aramaic dialects; many words, on the other hand, cannot be referred to the Aramaic prototype. Thus through the centuries we find the written Edessan and the local spoken dialect side by side, the former mostly preserved in its old form by obedience to tradition; the latter, unrestricted by rules or writing, continued to drift and modify. The vernacular normally adopted a large number of foreign words from the neighboring languages, making them conform to the phonetic pattern of spoken Aramaic. On the plain of Urmiyah, Azeri Turkish and Persian words were used freely, more in some districts than in others. In the Hakkari districts, Nestorian dialects borrowed from the vocabulary of their neighbors the Kurds, while on the plains of Mosul they drew from spoken Arabic. Depending on where they lived, the Christians also spoke fluently at least one of the neighboring languages.[15] Another source from which the Nestorian vernacular borrowed was, naturally, the classical Syriac itself; as the language of their liturgy and religious literature, its vocabulary seeped from the church to the village and enriched the vernacular, just as the Bible, when translated into the Urmiyah vernacular, would enrich the flavor of everyday speech.

Language," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 5 (1853), published separately in London, 1855.

[14] For the influence of Syriac on Arabic see Yūsuf Ḥubayqah, "al-Dawāthir al-Suryānīyah fi Lubnān wa Sūrīyah," *al-Mashriq*, 37 (1939), 290–412; Michel T. Féghali, *Études sur les emprunts syriaques dans les parlers arabes du Liban* (Paris, 1918); Mingana, "Syriac Influences on the Style of the Kuran"; P.K. Hitti, *al-Lughāt al-Sāmīyah al-Maḥkīyah fi Sūrīyah wa-Lubnān* (Beirut, 1922).

[15] See above, p. 87.

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After having done the indispensable preparatory work of studying the language scientifically, the missionaries undertook the task of translating the Bible. Smith and Dwight had reported that nowhere in the Nestorian country was there an entire copy of the Bible in classical Syriac.[16] There were only the books of the Church and they were scarce; the Psalter, the Gospels, and the Epistles were possessed by every church, but whatever books the Nestorians had were in the obscure classical Syriac. The only works in the vernacular that the American missionaries found in 1831 were a few translations of a Catholic catechism and a few prayers. Indeed, it is hardly possible to speak of any accomplishments of the Nestorians in the field of literature after the late Middle Ages. Like the secular literature of their Muslim neighbors, that of the Nestorians consisted mainly of popular sayings, stories, songs, and poems. Until the end of the nineteenth century, Christian songs in the vernacular were all sacred or on Biblical themes; for secular songs they went to Turkish or Kurdish languages, something no longer true at the time of this writing.

One of the main reasons why there was nothing written in the vernacular was due to the difference of the dialects among the Nestorians themselves; this made it almost impossible to write books that could be understood by everyone. Because of their widely scattered tribal and rural condition throughout the ages, their language had many dialects, some with marked peculiarities of their own. Each district, almost each village, had an intonation sufficiently different to make it difficult for members of two widely separated tribes to understand each other with ease. The greatest difference existed between the Urmiyah dialect and those spoken in Kurdistan. The only standardized language these people had in common was classical Syriac, their literary medium. A few ecclesiastics conducted their correspondence in it and some were even able to converse in it with each other.

As a result of this situation there were very few people who could read or understand classical Syriac. Perkins wrote that few as books were among the Nestorians, their readers were scarcely more numerous. In general, when the missionaries arrived only the clergy could read, and those who did read—the ecclesiastical hierarchy included—

[16] Grant reported that only the Nestorian patriarch possessed an entire Bible and even that was in half a dozen different volumes.

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were very imperfectly educated in it. A majority of the priesthood could merely chant their devotions, without knowing the meaning. Even some of the bishops among the mountaineers, reported Perkins, were in this predicament.

When the American clergy began their translations they selected the Urmiyah folk speech as their standard because Persia was the major field of their endeavor. Their choice of that dialect created particular difficulties in the mountains. Even toward the end of the nineteenth century we find students in Hakkari mission schools studying the classical and reading little in the newly-written Urmiyah vernacular. Besides the differences that existed between the Urmiyah and Hakkari dialects, the way the new language was written made it even more unintelligible. At the beginning the spelling method used was phonetic; it was not until the end of the century that the genesis of the vernacular was further investigated and more attention paid to its etymology. Efforts were made to standardize spelling as well as to modify many misleading spellings previously used.[17]

In order to teach the written vernacular, the missionaries began to provide primers, grammars, textbooks, philological treatises, and various grades of dictionaries. Of primary importance was religious literature, including theological treatises, Biblical expositions, hymnals, and manuals of doctrine.[18] The scope of these literary activities went far beyond the religious; it covered a wide range of works in history, ethics, education, and literature.

By the end of the nineteenth century the revived Aramaic, sometimes called "Neo-Syriac," was widely used as a literary medium in Urmiyah; but while Persian Nestorians were reading even newspapers in their vernacular, it was still common at the turn of the century for some of the mountaineers, who could by then read and understand classical Syriac perfectly, not to be able to read and understand the new language. As a literary language, however, neo-Syriac gradually became the symbol of cultural value and was accepted as the favored and desirable form of speech by the educated. The folk language, used in hymn and sermon, revived the Nestorians spiritually. When the Lord's prayer was first translated into the

[17] For details on the orthography of "modern Syriac," see Murre-van den Berg, pp. 103 seq.

[18] For a bibliography of modern Syriac books published by the missions see Thomas Laurie, *The Ely Volume* (Boston, 1881), pp. 507–508.

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vernacular, sentence by sentence, with the help of the Nestorian ecclesiastics, the latter had giggled with amusement. But gradually proficient teachers and eloquent preachers taught and preached salvation in neo-Syriac in practically all the villages. After the First World War, when the two major groups of Nestorians intermingled more, the local manners of speech became more and more saturated with elements borrowed from the "Urmiyah Aramaic"; today the standardized form of speech of almost all the "Assyrians" has become more set in its vocabulary, form, and even pronunciation, although in recent years efforts have been made to standardize, and write in, other vernaculars especially the dialect of Alqosh, spoken in northern Iraq.

Religious Revival and Rivalry

At first the missionaries carefully avoided doing anything that might seem to interfere with the old ecclesiastical arrangements or that might have even the appearance of proselytizing. They were especially determined in every possible way to avoid a break with the ancient church or to establish a separate Protestant congregation. During the early period Nestorian bishops, priests and deacons served as assistants of the missionaries and the ancient Syriac liturgy was retained both in public worship and in the administering of sacraments.[19]

The Protestants insisted only that in addition to the liturgies there be abundant preaching of the Gospel in the vernacular. Gradually the more "advanced assistants" were invited to join in the private services of the missionaries. Later they admitted to their circle any who applied. In 1855 a Protestant congregation with 158 members was established followed in 1862 by a native presbytery. No official separation from the Nestorian Church was effected by these moves, largely because of the strong opposition to them on the part of the Nestorians, the Roman Catholics, and the Persian government.

Soon after the Badr Khan massacre[20] the patriarchal family became fiercely opposed to the American "dissenters." As early as 1844, the

[19] Julius A. Richter, *A History of Protestant Missions in the Near East* (London, 1910), pp. 298–299.

[20] See above, pp. 72–85.

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year after that catastrophe, a brother of Mar Shamun had issued an order to the girls of the Fiske Seminary threatening that "if you do not come to us tomorrow, we will excommunicate you from our most holy Church; your finger nails shall be torn out; we will hunt you from village to village and kill you if we can."[21] Most of the Nestorian ecclesiastics, restive under their loss of support, and jealous of the progress of evangelism, joined the patriarch. This opposition, always exploited by the Catholic missionaries, gradually became so violent that for a few years the Protestants were compelled to disband all their village schools on the plain of Urmiyah.

An important reason for the rift between the Nestorians and the American missionaries was the intolerance and the uncompromising attitude of the evangelists themselves; they found it hard to see "the pious natives" scattered instead of being "bound together as they should be in a firm and delightful brotherhood." By refusing to recognize any truth or values in Nestorian beliefs and practices the Protestants made the people hostile and even Christ a little foreign. To Perkins the fasts of the Nestorians amounted to little more than a senseless routine of forms "and their prayers, we fear, are a chattering noise." He wrote that he did not know "what more artful contrivance Satan could have invented, as a substitute for the pure religion of the Gospel, than he had furnished in the fasts of the oriental churches."[22] The festivals which followed each fast were "seasons of the most disgusting dissipation." (When Grant had expostulated with Nestorian priests for making free use of wine, they had justified themselves on the ground that they did no injury but were more pleasant under its influence.)

Mr. Cochran, the man in charge of the boys' seminary, explained the conditions under which the missionaries would have continued within the Nestorian Church. He wrote that the missionaries would have been more than content to labor on without a separate church organization "so long as the Old Church did not oppose evangelical labors, so long as she freely opened her doors to our services, consenting to a separate administration of the ordinances for the hopefully pious, and silently tolerated many ecclesiastical and social reforms, and an abandonment of the liturgical services"; On the contrary, wrote Cochran, the native priests continued to administer

[21] R.E. Speer, *The Foreign Doctor* (New York, 1911), p. 321.
[22] *Missionary Herald*, 33 (1837), 33; Justin Perkins, p. 253.

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communion every few weeks to the whole people, without distinction of character; they "enjoin the fasts and saints' days, resume the use of the liturgy in ancient Syriac, burn incense daily, bow before the altar, and make the sign of the cross." He lamented that with "these superstitions" there was "a painful throwing off of moral restraint, and intemperance and kindred vices have greatly increased."[23] Under these circumstances it was not too long before it was decided that "the dead church could not be galvanized into spiritual life. There was no way for the truly enlightened but to leave it and form reunions on the Apostolic basis." To the Secretary of the American Board, the Nestorian Patriarch "could no more adjust himself to the coming age of light and liberty of conscience than the Pope of Rome."[24]

The evangelical Nestorians, sometimes called "Americans" (*Amairkaye*) by members of the mother church, themselves wanted to assume an independent position as a native institution; they did not want to be regarded as individual followers of foreign missionaries. In Persia, and even more so in the Ottoman Empire, where a variety of Christian denominations flourished, those who found no spiritual nourishment in their own native churches wanted their congregations to be fully recognized by the law of the land, and their constitution as a "sect" to be formally sanctioned by the government on a basis of equality with other Christian bodies.[25] Without this governmental recognition of their civil status, religious communities in the Muslim world could have no organized existence.[26] At length the "Reformed Nestorian Church" was recognized; it broke away from the Old Church and formed an evangelical synod. The new church now had its own legal board empowered to adjudicate disputes among its church members.

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[23] Quoted by Anderson, II, 317–319.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 293.

[25] For further discussion of the problem of the official recognition of Christian sects, see above, pp. 59ff.

[26] For a discussion of the formation of the Protestant millet in Turkey see Young, II, pp. 107–111; Anderson, II, 1–11; Le Vote de La Jonquière, *Histoire de l'Empire Ottoman* (Paris, 1914), I, 492; N. Sousa, *The Capitulatory Regime of Turkey* (Baltimore, 1933), pp. 141–142; Steen de Jehay, pp. 218–226; A. Carleton, "The Development of Missionary Policy in Turkey," (Thesis submitted at the Hartford Theological Seminary in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity, May 1930), pp. 5–8; Ahmad Ṣafwat, *Qaḍā' al-Aḥwāl al-Shakhsīyah lil-Ṭawā'if al-Millīyah* (Cairo, n.d.), pp. 83–87.

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The Catholic missionaries, as we have seen, had split the Nestorian community of Azerbayjan long before the evangelical movement started. Since the seventeenth century Carmelite missionaries had won over to the Church of Rome all the inhabitants of Salmas, a Persian district of Azerbayjan that adjoined Urmiyah. The Catholic mission in Salmas was suspended in the late eighteenth century as a result of the French Revolution, but with the advent of the American missionaries in Urmiyah, the College of Propaganda at Rome felt alarmed at the danger to which its flock in Salmas was exposed.[27] It was decided that European energy alone could stem the invasion from the Western hemisphere; for this purpose French Lazarist friars were dispatched to Urmiyah as early as 1838.[28]

The Lazarists were financially poor compared to the Americans, but they abounded in zeal; they were soon able to hold their ground, preserve their flock and even launch an offensive on the plain of Urmiyah.[29] Before long they were able to establish a Catholic congregation in the town of Urmiyah as well as schools for boys and girls, a theological seminary, an orphanage, a hospital, and a printing press. Their press, unlike the American establishment, devoted itself to the publication of Church books from Syriac manuscripts in use by the Nestorians. Through the decades that followed their schools have produced a number of learned scholars and educated ecclesiastics.[30]

Backed by the French Minister in Tehran, the Lazarists made common cause with the Nestorian bishops and tried to incite the Persian authorities to expel the Americans. Faced with much public disorder and intrigue, the Persian government at one time forbade proselytizing among Christians, the governor of Urmiyah even threatening that Nestorians who departed from the way of their fathers were to be treated as "criminals."[31] "If there is one human being," wrote Perkins in his journal, "of whom more than all others, the language of the apostle to Elymas, the sorcerer, 'thou enemy of righteousness, thou child of the devil,' may be applied,

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[27] See Piolet, I, 199.

[28] Joseph Schmidlin, *Catholic Mission History*, trans. and ed. Matthias Brown (Techny, Ill., 1933), pp. 586–587; Louvet, pp. 138–141.

[29] *Annual Report* of the ABCFM, 1855, p. 85.

[30] The names of Paul Bedjan, a "Catholic Nestorian" from Salmas, and Alphonso Mingana, a "Chaldean" of Mosul, are well known to scholars of Syriac.

[31] J.P. Thompson, pp. 385–386.

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that individual is the European Jesuit in his wily efforts to oppose and embarrass Protestant missionaries."[32] To another missionary, Catholic malevolence was "unparalleled in corrupt Persia."[33] But the Catholics were only partly acting in retaliation against the silent opposition of the Protestants. One of the first works of the American mission press in Urmiyah was a tract in Syriac entitled "Twenty-two Plain Reasons for not Being a Roman Catholic." The tract, said the Secretary of the American Board, "The corrupt doctrines and practices" of Catholics are "exposed by an array of Scriptural texts.[34]

Left behind by the Protestants and Catholics were members of the Nestorian community who remained loyal to their mother church. Some Nestorian leaders, former associates of the American missionaries, began to appeal to the Church of England for help soon after the Protestants organized the first native presbytery in 1862. Only a few months after the presbytery was organized, the Nestorian Patriarch petitioned Queen Victoria herself for help. Then followed a petition addressed to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1868. Interested as much in political protection and pecuniary aid as they were in religion and education, the Nestorians complained that they had no schools wherein to educate their youth and that their seminaries had either been taken from them or had become the resort of the vain and the wicked.[35]

An earnest response to the Nestorian request was made in 1877 when an exploratory mission headed by E.L. Cutts was sent "to ask for some definite plan in which England might render assistance in improving and extending the education of the Nestorian people." When Anglican mission arrived in Urmiyah in 1877, it was given a great reception, not only by the Christians but by the Persian officials and dignitaries as well. As if taking the good will of the Persians for granted, Cutts wrote that the reception they were granted was "a great demonstration for the Nestorians" and that the Persians "must henceforth regard the Nestorians as having powerful friends."[36] The

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[32] Justin Perkins, p. 396.

[33] *Annual Report* of the ABCFM, 1868, p. 60.

[34] Anderson, I, 196

[35] J. Heinrichs, "Modern Nestorianism of Persia," *Missionary Review,* 21 (1908), 754; *Missionary Herald,* 56 (1870), 189–191. Also in 1868, the Nestorian prelate addressed a letter to the Russian governor-general of the Caucasus asking him for help. For quotes from the letter, see below, p. 110–111.

[36] E.L. Cutts, *Christians Under the Crescent in Asia* (London, 1877). p. 250.

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recommendations of the Cutts mission resulted in a formal mission from the Church of England. Called the Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian Mission, it arrived on the scene of its labors in 1885, some fifty years after the Americans had started their work.[37]

The Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian Mission opposed proselytizing and aimed at the reformation of the Nestorian Church from within, publicly announcing that they had come to defend the Eastern Christians against the Americans.[38] The Anglicans collaborated with the patriarch, assuring him that their desire was not to create schisms among his people, as was the aim of the Roman Catholics and the Presbyterians, but only to aid the existing church. Like the Roman Catholics, the Anglicans endeavored to cultivate classical Syriac and emphasized it in their schools. They discovered valuable ecclesiastical treasures which they published and made available to both Western scholars and the native clergy. They established schools throughout the province; in the town of Urmiyah they had a seminary for priests and candidates for holy orders, and two boarding schools for boys and girls. Students were taught to take pride in their national customs and to look down upon those who adopted European dress and manners.

Only three years after the arrival of the missionaries of the Church of England, a Protestant journal complained that the clerics from England were giving the Presbyterian brethren in Persia no little trouble. "They are establishing churches and schools which directly interfere with the work carried on by the American Presbyterians . . ." These "ritualists," observed the editorial, "must know as all the world knows, that the American missionaries have accomplished great things in Persia, giving the Bible to the people and leading them by thousands out of their superstitions to a better faith and purer lives. And yet these English ritualists speak of these missionaries as dangerous to the Nestorian Church."[39] Two years later we read that the number of new members in the evangelical church was "the smallest reported for many years." The annual report of the Board spoke of the many who have been led astray by the Ritualist party, noting "the loose morals taught by their new teachers in regard to Sabbath

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[37] J.F. Coakley's *The Church of the East and the Church of England*, cited above, is a masterly piece of work on the history of that mission.

[38] Richter, p. 309; Bishop, II, 230; S.G. Wilson, *Persia, Western Mission* (Philadelphia, 1896), p. 345; Sandreczki, III, 70.

[39] *Missionary Herald*, 84 (1888), 467; see also Cutts, pp. 282–289.

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observance, wine drinking, and other things."[40] This rivalry between the Western churches had an unwholesome effect upon the Persian Christians; they were persistently warned against the errors, sins, and heresies of this and that congregation. Speaking of the Church of England's mission to the "Assyrian Christians," an outstanding member of the American mission wrote that "Just as far as possible, directly and indirectly, by precept and by example, in sermon, in teaching, through Nestorian ecclesiastics, the Old Church is being fortified against Protestant influences."[41]

Missionaries Exert Political Influence

As we have observed, before the advent of the foreign missions, the hardships of the Christians did not come from the ordinary peasant Muslim population, which often was as poor and nearly as much oppressed as the Christians. The misfortunes of the minority and majority both came from their own landlords and from government officials whose petty acts of injustice characterized a self-serving system of government. The lord of the village settled all disputes arising between his subjects; rarely did the Christians bring their complaints to the attention of the civil servants, and then only when another village was involved.[42] But as these oppressions increased in the nineteenth century the missionaries brought their personal influence to bear in behalf of the Christians, never failing to present gross cases of injustice before the governors of Urmiyah or Azerbayjan, often securing the relief and justice they sought.[43] As early as 1845 the evangelists in Persia joined with the native Christians in making representation of their grievances to the capital. At the instance of the English and Russian representatives in Tehran, a special governor (*Sarparast*) was appointed to the Christians in the hope that he would protect them from acts of discrimination.[44]

The arrangements reached in the capital, however, were usually nullified by local officials and landlords. Thus in a few years we find

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[40] *Annual Report* of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, 1890, p. 164.

[41] William A. Shedd, "Relation of the Protestant Missionary Effort to the Nestorian Church," *Missionary Review*, 8, (1895), 741.

[42] Speer, *The Foreign Doctor*, p. 305.

[43] For political support in behalf of Ottoman Nestorians, see below, pp. 113f.

[44] Anderson, I, 325; Speer, *The Foreign Doctor*, p. 305.

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litigation increasing as a result of the creation of the office of *Sarparast.* This official depended for his livelihood to a great extent on what he could get from the Christians in the way of fines. It was to his interest, as well as that of his minor officials, to stir up quarrels or magnify trifles. People were encouraged to make complaints and the defendant was always mulcted in costs if in nothing else. For a good compensation, in advance, even a "great mujahid" or "some notorious or powerful sayyid" would promise to secure the Christian his right.[45] With their new "freedom," the emboldened Nestorians entered complaints before the governor even against their own masters. The process not only generated bitterness between the peasants and their overlords, but also produced an aggravation of the oppression. These Afshar landlords were among the wealthiest and most influential men of the region; it was no small matter for this nobility to be forced to answer to charges brought against them by some despicable *gavours*, subjects of their own. In such cases, the *Sarparast* would often side with the landlords rather than encourage the pitiful litigation of the Christian plebeians.

The time came when the missionaries and native leaders tried to have the office of the *Sarparast* abolished by encouraging their people to settle disputes among themselves. Gradually the Nestorians became more and more ready to refer their problems to the prominent men of their own community. The Americans helped set up a general committee, made up of representatives of the three churches (Nestorian, Catholic, and Protestant), whose task was to settle interdenominational disputes.

Two major grievances of the Christian Persians remained unsolved until late in the century: (1) According to the Persian law which then prevailed, if a member of a Christian family turned Muslim, he or she became entitled to all of the property of the family, and "family" was defined not only as the parents but as its collateral branches as well; (2) The testimony of a Christian against that of a Muslim was not accepted in a court of law.[46] In 1881 Persian laws

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[45] From a paper read by Joseph Cochran of the Urmiyah Mission before the annual meeting of the West Persia Mission in 1900, on "The Missionary and Native Litigation," quoted by Speer, p. 307.

[46] By the promulgation of the Imperial Khatts, Khatt-i Shaif of 1839 and Khatt-i Humayun of 1856, Turkey had admitted in principle that there was to be no difference in respect to the testimony of a Christian in a court of justice against a Muslim. See *Parliamentary Papers* 100 (1881), Cmd. 2851, no. 55.

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respecting the Nestorians were modified and reestablished at the instance of the British Minister at Tehran.[47] Some of the more common grievances of the Christian population were indirectly described by the rights and regulations of the new law; among the thirty points of the law were the following seven:

5. Amongst abuses which have been represented to Government is one that capitation tax is taken from infants. This has not been [the custom] and never could have been allowed, nor can it be so now.
9. Each family possessing fowls has had to give two chickens [to the landlord]. This is not to be claimed from those who have no fowls, nor is money to be taken in lieu.
18. Khans and land-owners who travel with a large retinue may not take provisions for their beasts and cattle without payment or exchange.
22. Respecting the embracing of Mahommedanism, any who have done so shall, with the knowledge of the *Sarparast*, be duly enregistered, having their names and professions specified; but in case of any one wishing to return [to Christianity] he shall be punished according to law.
23. Subjects of the Shah are at liberty to settle wherever they like, and no one shall interfere with them.
27. In case a [Christian] peasant buys property from a Moslem, the latter shall not have the right to recover the land, under pretext of having been cheated, after improvements have been made.
30. . . . in all questions relating to inheritance, the hearing of testimony, etc., the injunctions of the faith will be followed, obeyed, and executed according to separate instruction which have been issued in respect thereto.[48]

As a result of negotiations between the British Minister and the Persian Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Governor of Urmiyah was directed to prevent converts to Islam from claiming or obtaining more than such share of property of a deceased relative "as would

[47] Text entitled "Persian Regulations respecting the Nestorian Community in the District of Oroomiah—1864," in *British and Foreign State Papers* 78 (1881–1882), 336–340.

[48] *Loc. cit.*

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fall to them under the custom prevalent among Christians."[49] Respecting the question of testimony, the authorities were instructed that suits between Christians and Muslims would thenceforth be tried only by civil courts, and Christians would be placed on a footing of equality with the Muslims in the giving of evidence.[50]

The foregoing arrangements were communicated to the American missionaries in Azerbayjan; they were requested "to assist in securing the proper observance of the new Regulations by reporting any flagrant case of violations which may occur."[51] The British Consul at Tabriz, who in 1881 investigated the political and social condition of the Azerbayjan Christians, reported that the rising generation among them was receiving a sound education, both religious and secular and was learning to read and speak in the Anglo-Saxon tongue. "Christianity," he wrote, "diffusing its many blessings throughout these regions, affords the best guarantee for future progress, and is gradually ushering in a period of enlightenment and peace."[52] Unfortunately, the blessings of Christianity of which the consul spoke were not to bear much fruit.

The disturbed state of political relations in mid-nineteenth century between Persia and Great Britain over Afghanistan and the threat of Russia from the north, added to the difficulties of the missions and their proteges. Muslim landlords, believing that their government was opposed to these foreign enterprises, started to molest the Christians through their Muslim peasants and underlings. The missionaries described the situation of the native Christians as unbearable. After almost thirty years in Persia, Perkins wrote that he had never known such suffering among the Nestorians as then existed. After a full generation of foreign missionary help and effort among them, the Nestorians, we read, were losing their affection for their beautiful fields and vineyards, for the homes of their childhood and youth and for the churches of their fathers, hoping to escape to some asylum beyond their native land. They often lifted their eyes toward Russia, a "Christian" power which, to them, gave the Muslims their due. As early as 1861 we find the people much excited, expecting "some Russian priests to come and be their protectors." The Persian

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[49] Cf. W.J. Fischel, "The Jews of Persia," *Jewish Social Studies*, 12 (1950), 119–160.
[50] *Parliamentary Papers*, 100 (1881), Cmd. 2851, no. 3.
[51] *Loc. cit.*
[52] *Ibid.*, no. 55

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government "aware of this agitation and fearing the influence and power from the north, issued stringent orders in behalf of their Christian subjects."[53] The American missionaries, always concerned with Muslim souls, wished that a Christian power would take over or at least offer protection. "It may perhaps be the design of Providence," wrote the American Board in its annual report, "to allow the great northern power to extend over northern Persia, to break the Mohammedan yoke there, and thus remove the death penalty, which is now a bar to the conversion of the Persians to Christ."[54]

Missionary Rhea, from Tennessee, wrote to the American diplomats in both Turkey and Russia, pleading with them to solicit the protection of the Russian government for the Nestorian Christians; they were treated, he wrote, "with brutal tyranny by the Persian officials."[55] The American Minister in Russia had taken up the matter with the Russian Secretary of State, who had promised serious consideration, expressing satisfaction that it was to Russia that the American missionaries had turned for help.[56]

British Concerns

The British government, the superpower of the day, thought differently on these matters. A few months following the above correspondence, the British Secretary of State, Lord Russell, addressed the following communication to his minister in Tehran:

> I have . . . been informed that steps have been taken to induce the Nestorians to profess the Greek faith, and to place themselves under the protection of Russia. The Persian Government should weigh well the consequences of a large body of its subjects being compelled, for self preservation, to take such a step. For, if the Nestorians, in order

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[53] *Annual Report of* the ABCFM, 1863, pp. 110–111.

[54] *Ibid.*

[55] The United States did not have a diplomatic representative in Persia until 1883. During the period under discussion the representative from Alabama saw no reason why the United States minister to Turkey could not discharge all the duties of that position and "do everything a minister to Persia could do, especially when "there is not one cent of commerce . . . between Persia and us." See *The Congressional Globe* (2nd Session, 35th Congress), January 19, 1859, p. 458.

[56] United States of America, *Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs*, 1862, Part 2, pp. 457–458.

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> to obtain relief from their sufferings, formed a union with either the Greek or Latin Churches, the Persian Government must be well aware that the Governments of France and Russia would interfere authoritatively on their behalf; and the Persian Government must not imagine that public opinion in this country would disapprove an interference to put an end to systematic oppression inflicted with their tacit permission on a Christian community.[57]

Such warnings and improved relations between Great Britain and Persia did help matters during the next few decades. The Russian threat was postponed and would not materialize until the turn of the century. Nasruddin (Nasir al-Din) Shah's three sumptuous trips to Europe resulted in greater religious toleration for his non-Muslim subjects. As early as 1865 he had subscribed one hundred British pounds toward the construction of a Nestorian church to replace one that was seized by the Catholic party. The Church Missionary Society of Great Britain was allowed to work at Isfahan in 1869. In 1870 the Nestorian Mission, renamed Mission to Persia was transferred to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, with stations in Tehran, Tabriz, Hamadan, and Resht in an effort to reach the entire population of the country.[58] It was during this period also that the Nestorian evangelical church established itself as a separate organization. By 1880 the Protestant community had a civil head who acted as its spokesman and appeared before the authorities when cases involving evangelists came before the government. Missionary work in Urmiyah had expanded by this time to include a modest college with medical, academic, and theological departments. The cupboard dispensary of the early days had gradually grown into a hospital well known throughout Persia. The missionaries had themselves acquired a new perspective; unlike the early pioneers, those of the end of the century were beginning to appreciate the problems and customs of the natives and to sympathize with them more.

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[57] Letter dated July 30, 1863, in Great Britain, Public Record Office, in memorandum printed for the use of the Foreign Office, December, 1876 (Confidential 3003), F.O. 78/2702, p. 25.

[58] During the first fifty years of missionary work in the Near East, Syria, Palestine, and Persia were under the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, which represented the Congregational denomination together with the Presbyterians and certain smaller groups. After the Civil War all denominations except the Presbyterian withdrew from the American Board. In 1870 the Presbyterians also separated and the field was divided, with the Congregationalists in Turkey proper and the Presbyterians in Syria, Palestine, and Persia.

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In 1895 we hear physician-missionary Shedd speak of the need for a "fuller knowledge of the Old Church and its peculiar trials and dangers." Superstition, old customs and traditions, he wrote, "are elements in the life of the people which we need to understand."[59]

In the Ottoman Empire the American missionaries had closed their station in the Hakkari region even though native and American preachers occasionally brought their Good News to the mountains. These itinerant evangelists were suspected by the Turks as well as Kurds. In 1870 the British Consul at Erzerum conveyed to his counterpart in Tabriz the perceived charge by the Turkish governor that "the American missionaries were exciting the hopes of the mountain Nestorians respecting political aid from England."[60] What the British Consul did not realize in 1870 was that the Turks and Kurds would soon find a British mission permanently stationed among the Nestorians of Hakkari, at the Nestorian Patriarch's village of Qotchanis—"The Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian Mission."

[59] Shedd in *Missionary Review* (1885), p. 746.
[60] Consult R.E. Speer, *Missions and Politics in Asia* (New York, 1897), p. 54.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE POWERS, KURDS, AND CHRISTIANS

We have thus far noted two important nineteenth-century events that were beginning to have a direct impact on the modern history of the "Nestorian" Christians: 1. The great "evangelical awakening" in England and the United States of America developed into a global Protestant apostolic movement in the nineteenth century; Churches from the United States of America and England sought out this historic linguistic and religious minority and directly influenced it.[1] 2. The great archaeological discoveries of the 1830s and 1840s, which unearthed the remains of the great Assyrian empire, gave rise to the supposition that these Christians were the direct descendants of the ancient Assyrians. This identification eventually led this small minority astray to a kind of political blindness to the realities that surrounded it, a subject that will be examined in the chapters that follow. In this chapter we shall briefly examine a third major nineteenth-century development that would help shape the history of the modern Assyrians: the encroachment of Tsarist Russia on Persian and Ottoman territories, close to where the Nestorians lived, resulting in their entanglement in European power politic, with especially tragic consequences during and after World War I.

Tsarist expansion through Transcaucasia, which was mainly at the expense of Persia and Turkey, had its roots in the early 18th Century when Peter the Great turned his attention in 1722 to the lands east of the Black Sea and those to the south of them. The state of anarchy in that region meant that, with practically no resistance, Russian troops occupied, even though temporarily, such cities as Baku, Gilan, Darband, and Mazandaran. By the end of the eighteenth century, under Catherine the Great, the way was paved for Russian expansion through the Caucasus, threatening eastern Turkey as well as northwestern Iran.[2]

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[1] For details on this topic, see above, pp. 65–72.

[2] For a recent study of the Transcaucasian provinces before the advent of Russian takeover, with emphasis on Armenia, consult George A. Bournoutian, *The Khanate of Erevan under Qajar Rule*, 1795–1823 (Costa Mesa, California, 1992).

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The opening year of the nineteenth century saw the Russians unilaterally declare Georgia a part of their empire. Persia, which had ruled parts of Georgia, went to war but was defeated; she signed most of her Caucasian possessions away in 1813 in the Treaty of Gulistan. Persia's desire to regain her territory and Russian provocations along the newly established boundary led to another war and another Russian victory. The Tsar's troops captured Erevan and Tabriz and threatened Tehran. By the Treaty of Turkmanchai in 1828 the Russo-Iranian frontier was drawn up along the Araxes River. The war had hardly ended when the Russians overran Turkish territory. In the summer of 1828 Russian armies advanced westward as far as the citadel city of Erzerum, taking Kars along the way.

Russian conquest of Muslim-inhabited territories often led to Muslim migrations into Turkey. Almost the entire region from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea, and from the Caucasus mountains in the north to the Turko-Persian frontier in the south, was embroiled in a bloody and ruthless civil war, inflaming age-old ethnic and religious animosities. In less than a hundred years after the coming of the Russians the events that would flow from Russian presence would completely transform the human ecology of this region. As we shall see, the social, cultural, political and military developments of the next few decades would by the early twentieth century see practically the cessation of Christian existence in Eastern Anatolia, where these Eastern Christians had lived for centuries.

Thousands of Urmiyah Nestorians—the father of this writer was one of them—found employment as laborers and contractors in nearby Russian territory; many settled there permanently in villages around Erivan, to which they had been trickling ever since the Treaty of Turkmanchai was signed in 1828. It was not too long before the Nestorians learned that they could seek political protection from Russia on the basis of their religion, just as their Chaldean brethren before them had sought French protection when they embraced Roman Catholicism, in accordance with treaties that the Ottomans had signed with European powers.

Great Britain, the superpower of the day ruling India, was concerned. As early as 1847, when the Nestorian patriarch had fled from Mosul to Urmiyah, the British government urged him to return and prevailed upon the Ottoman government to help him lest his people, left without a leader, place themselves under French pro-

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tection as Catholics.[3] By mid-nineteenth century the British Foreign Office was referring to the Nestorians as a community "in whose welfare they feel much interest."[4] By the early 1860s, as already noted, the Nestorians sent a petition directly to Queen Victoria.[5] Earl Russell responded, advising the British representative in Istanbul "to call the serious attention of the Porte to the statements contained in [the Nestorian] petition." Russell asked his ambassador to advise the Grand Vizier Ali Pasha that Her Majesty's government take a deep interest in the welfare of the Nestorians; "You will suggest," he informed the British representative, "that steps should be taken at once to relieve them from the oppression to which they are subjected." In response to these instructions the British Consul at Diyarbakr was sent through the Nestorian districts to ascertain their grievances; his reports confirmed the insecure position of the Christians there.

By mid-nineteenth century Ottoman authority in eastern Anatolia was partially substituted for the feudal rule of the Kurdish chiefs who had previously defied it; this was accomplished at the cost of weakening the provincial government to a degree that made vigorous administration impossible. The whole eastern frontier of the Hakkari region was bounded by Persia; Persian Kurds—equally at home in both countries—crossed the border whenever it suited their purpose. All attempts to levy taxes, enforce conscription, and arrest offenders were thwarted by a hasty Kurdish migration to Persia or Turkey as the case may be.[6] The Nestorian patriarch, charged with collection of taxes and arrears, could not prevail upon his people to

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[3] F.O. 78/2699, nos. 259, 360; F.O., 78/2702, no. 3003, p. 21.

[4] "Instructions addressed to Her Majesty's Embassy at Constantinople, respecting Financial and Administrative Reform, and the Protection of Christians in Turkey, 1856–74," *Parliamentary Papers* 92 (1877), Cmd. 1740, no. 34.

[5] For the original 1863 text of the petition in Syriac, see F.O. 78/2700.

[6] The nature of the various "species of maltreatment and oppression" suffered for two years during the 1860s is described by a British consul in these words: The Nestorians, he wrote, "have been plundered of several thousand head of sheep, cattle, and mules; several villages have been entirely pillaged, six of their churches destroyed; eight men barbarously murdered, and no less than ten virgins and married women ravished and forcibly abducted from their homes by the Koords or Government police. In addition, the Koords, to the number of several thousands, quarter themselves and cattle habitually during winter on the Christian villages, eating up the provender and provisions the natives may have stored up for the necessary wants of themselves and their animals." "Reports by Her Majesty's Diplomatic and Consular Agents in Turkey, respecting the Condition of the Christian Subjects of the Porte, 1868–75," *Parliamentary Papers*, 92 (1877), Cmd. 1739, nos. 9, 13.

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recognize or discharge a burden which they alleged was due to the absence of good government. Kurdish violence, they complained, occasioned them yearly losses amounting to double the sums claimed by the government in arrears. Tax arrears increased annually and amounted to a sum "equivalent to nearly the whole value of all [the Nestorian] property and cattle."[7]

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Great Britain, anxious to keep Russia from exploiting the disturbed situation on the Perso-Turkish frontier, was mainly interested in maintaining Turkey and Persia as buffer states between India and Russia. It urged the Porte to take care that no acts of violence were committed toward the Nestorian community, "which, especially at the present time, would not fail to be construed by the nations of Europe to the serious disadvantage of the Porte."[8] In the minds of many, if not of a majority, of the concerned British public, possession by Russia of the eastern provinces of "Asiatic Turkey" would bring disastrous results to their own empire; consequently any steps taken by Russia to interfere in eastern Turkey or northern Persia were regarded with suspicion as moves of Russian expansionism, and were resisted accordingly.[9]

When the Nestorians saw that England did nothing significant to ameliorate their condition, they did not hesitate to appeal to Russia for help. In a letter addressed to the Russian governor-general of the Caucasus in 1868, their Patriarch described his people as "a nation of poor people, numbering more than 16,000 families living in these mountains of Kurdistan. They have no place to sow a sufficiency of grain to provide themselves with bread." He described his grievances against both the Kurds and the Turks: "The Kurds have forcibly taken possession of several of our churches and convents; they constantly abduct our virgins, brides, and women, forcing them to turn Moslem. For twenty years and more the Turks have taken possession of the country, but they are worse than the Kurds, as they do not protect us from them, but demand from us military taxes, poll tax, and other moneys. At the same time the Kurds demand and take from us, as was their custom of old, pre-

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[7] *Loc. cit.*

[8] *Ibid.*, Cmd. 1740, nos. 176, 176.

[9] M.W. Tyler, *The European Powers and the Near East, 1875–1908* (Minneapolis, 1925), pp. 150–51.

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tending the Nestorians [are] their "zirr kurr" (serfs), that is, bought with money by them." The Prelate pleaded that his 'Mightiness' the governor-general "either free us from such [a] state or procure us a remedy."

The British consul warned the Foreign Office that Nestorian overtures to Russia and their persistent attempts to gain foreign protection, even at the sacrifice of creed and country, might prove to be dangerous in the future. In his opinion, the desperate remedies the Nestorians were willing to resort to might be destined to form at some future period another item in the long list of Christian grievances that "the Russians are accustomed to put forward, from time to time, to serve their own ends."[10] In the event of a future rupture between Turkey and Russia or Turkey and Persia, the nuisance value of these dissatisfied elements, including the Kurds—certain of whose tribes sided with the Nestorians—could not be overestimated. The importance of these groups was not due to their wealth or intelligence but their position in a mountainous country close to the Persian and Russian frontier and to their number and martial spirit when necessity evoked it. A British document in 1869 estimated that the mountain Nestorians could furnish 13,000 able-bodied men, "all armed with good muskets."[11] Aided by such auxiliaries, or even having their sympathies, "any Russian force operating by Van with a view of penetrating from that side to Moosh and Diarbekr, would derive immense advantages, not so much from actual assistance as from the occupation their certain revolt would afford the Turkish troops to the south, about Mosul and Diarbekr."

Such information, forewarning of difficulties and dangers to come, was by no means the subject matter of Foreign Office intelligence reports alone. "It is well known," noted a British writer, "that the Russians have agents constantly at work amongst the Nestorians and Jacobites; and there is some likelihood of those sects being induced to declare themselves Orthodox Greeks, in order to acquire a title to the active sympathy and support of Russia."[12] He warned that the non-Muslim elements of the population, though not actively disaffected from the sultan, would look upon the advance of an invading army as a dispensation of Providence in their favor; advantages

[10] *Loc. cit.*
[11] *Ibid.*, no. 13.
[12] Geary, II, 76.

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would unquestionably be on the side of the invader in the event of a new Russo-Turkish war.[13]

Experts and military strategists had their say about the situation in eastern Anatolia and they were even more alarming. The imagination of amateur strategists carried them to astonishing lengths as they pictured Russia advancing from conquest to conquest.[14] On May 30, 1877, Layard wrote to the Earl of Derby, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, that England had to consider the effect upon her possessions in India of the annexation to Russia of the province of Armenia. Under these circumstances, commented Layard—the famous archaeologist turned British ambassador to Istanbul—Russia would command the whole of Asia Minor and the great valley of the Euphrates and Tigris, which would "inevitably fall into her hands in the course of time." There were rumors at this time that Russia had made secret offers to Persia to assist her in acquiring the province of Baghdad, including Karbala and Najaf, in exchange for Gaylan and Mazandaran. Layard was afraid that such rumors, though unfounded, might very well come true. He warned that when Persia found that the Turkish empire was threatened with dismemberment her own interest would get the better of any sympathy for Turkey and that, completely under the control of Russia, Persia would not be indisposed to agree to an arrangement such as that rumored.[15]

As a result of these fears and fantasies, one of the suggestions made was to ameliorate the unhappy condition of the non-Muslims and to bring the Kurds under subjugation. When the Christians found themselves properly protected, argued Geary, they would soon learn to have confidence in their government and would cease to cast their eyes toward Russia; the Kurds, seeing that the law was too strong for them would take to honest industry for a living and "turn a deaf ear to the incitements of Persian agents of dissatisfaction."[16]

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[13] *Loc. cit.*

[14] D.E. Lee, *Great Britain and the Cyprus Convention Policy of 1878* (Cambridge, Mass., 1934), pp. 63–64. See also R.E. Carr, "The Kurdistan Mountain Ranges in Reference to a Russian Advance on the Tigris Valley," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, 22 (1878–1879), 155–183.

[15] "Further Correspondence respecting the Affairs of Turkey," *Parliamentary Papers*, 92 (1877), Cmd. 1830, no. 60.

[16] Geary, II, 76–77. See also *Parliamentary Papers*, 92 (1877), Cmd. 1739, no. 9.

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British "Containment" Policy

What the Foreign Office had feared for decades finally seemed to happen in 1877–78 when as a result of a successful war with Turkey, Russia occupied a large part of eastern Turkey and insisted on the kind of reforms there that England had always urged Turkey to introduce.[17] In an attempt to win British cooperation, the Tsar declared in 1876 that Russia had no imperialistic designs on India or Constantinople; it was in the interest of England and Russia, he said, that there be peace and an improvement in the position of the Christians in the Ottoman Empire. His country would prefer to work with the European concert but if the latter would not act, then Russia would intervene alone.[18]

Events in the Balkans had come to a head in 1875–76 when the Ottoman government suppressed an uprising in Serbia and Bulgaria. Representatives of European governments convened in Istanbul in 1876 in order to avert another war between Russia and Turkey. Before the European recommendations could be formally presented to the Porte, the sultan promulgated the ill-fated 1876 constitution. Russia, unhappy with her relations with Turkey since the defeat of 1856, started war in 1877 and dictated its peace terms in the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878. At the insistence of England and Austria, at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, the Treaty of San Stefano was revised. The new treaty, thanks to Russian presence in Transcaucasia and to British rule in India, stressed also reforms in Asiatic Turkey, with emphasis on the eastern region of Anatolia where British economic interests had been growing.

Some of the major trade routes of the day used by British merchants, whether from Istanbul to Erzerum, or from Diyarbakr to Mosul, Aleppo, or Baghdad to the south, or to Trebizond and Batum to the north, crossed this tableland now threatened by Russian annexation.[19] Turkish imports to Diyarbakr and the surrounding regions

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[17] The entire Tanzimat or Reform movement in Turkey, which started as early as 1839, is closely related to the Eastern Question, or the question of British-Russian policy respecting Turkey. But efforts at reforms prior to 1878 had no significant effect on our corner of the empire and are not taken into consideration here for that reason.

[18] *British and Foreign State Papers*, 67: 1244–1248.

[19] Grattan Geary, *Through Asiatic Turkey*, 2 vols. (London, 1878), 2, 67–77. For an interesting study of British interests and policies in Mesopotamia, see Zaki Saleh, *Mesopotamia (Iraq) 1600–1914: A Study in British Foreign Affairs* (Baghdad, 1957).

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amounted to L115 thousand a year in the late 1870s; more than 75 percent of the goods came from England, the remainder from Russia, France, and Persia. The trade routes between the ports of the Black Sea and the interior of Iran also passed through these parts. The possession of Erzerum by Russia would, therefore, not only strike at the heart of Turkey but would sever Persia from the Black Sea.[20] Moreover, with the introduction of railway communication and better irrigation, these regions, under British supervision, might become the granary of both Europe and India, and this despite the fact that the overland route from the Mediterranean to India had of late suffered due to the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869.[21]

Great Britain was thus determined that reforms should be carried out, this time through her own participation. As a result of this serious intention she entered into a special defensive treaty with Turkey at a "convention" in Cyprus while the Congress at Berlin was still in session. According to the agreement reached, England would assist Turkey against any future encroachments by Russia and would protect the Christians and other subjects of the sultan in the Asiatic provinces. In return for these favors England was allowed to occupy Cyprus.[22] In transmitting the terms of the Cyprus Convention to France, England explained her containment policy as follows: "... Her Majesty's Government could not leave Western Asia lying unprotected at the feet of Russia. The prestige of her victories, proclaimed by the conquest and retention of so well known a fortress as Kars, would have announced her to the Mesopotamian and other Asiatic populations as the coming Power, and the existing Government would have lost all hold on their hopes and fears." The interest of England in the maintenance of the political *status quo* in Turkey and Persia was too great to allow Her Majesty's Government to acquiesce in their disintegration and absorption.[23]

In order to carry out its obligation effectively, the British government wanted to be directly involved; it appointed military consuls to various posts in eastern Turkey in order to watch closely over the activities of Turkish pashas and Kurdish aghas and to redress as far as possible the injustices which were brought to the consuls'

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[20] Lynch, *Armenia*, 2, 347. See also *British and Foreign State Papers, 1877–1878*, 69 (1885), 812–813.

[21] McCoan, *Protectorate*, 2, 100–1, 107; Lynch, *Armenia*, 2, 437–41.

[22] Cyprus attained its independence from Britain rule 81 years later, in 1959.

[23] *Ibid.*

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attention. In a letter dated April 24, 1879, appointing Major-General Charles Wilson as Her Majesty's Consul-General in Anatolia, Lord Salisbury clarified the principal duty of the consul as being

> to enquire into the conditions of the various classes of population within your consular districts, assisting the Turkish authorities with your advice, and with any information you may be able to collect of a nature to be useful to them, pointing out the means by which economy may be secured and the administration rendered more efficient. Where, in your judgment, a case exists for the intervention of the Central Government, you will report the matter to Her Majesty's Government and to the Embassy at Constantinople, in order that proper representation may be made at the Porte.[24]

The appointment of British military consuls in these far-away regions was widely understood to be the inauguration of the British "Protectorate of Asia Minor." The military consuls, in the eyes of Muslims and Christians alike, were, in the exaggerated remarks of an Englishman who had long resided in Turkey, "a continual reminder of the overshadowing power of the great Christian kingdom of the West. They were . . . a beacon of hope to the oppressed and repressed Christians of Eastern Turkey, encouraging them to crave for justice, and fostering in their hearts the inclination to demand the elementary right of personal safety for the person and the family."[25]

Nestorians Misguided

The Nestorians, with the British consuls to look after their welfare on the one hand and the missionaries of the Church of England about to live among them on the other, were distracted from the political and geographical realities of the situation, and encouraged to depend upon a fickle and uncertain foreign protection. A couple of years before the arrival of the consuls, the exploratory mission of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Nestorians, headed by E.L. Cutts, had already arrived in Hakkari.[26] During his few days stay

[24] Charles M. Watson, *The Life of Major General Sir Charles William Wilson* (London, 1909), p. 106.

[25] M.W. Ramsay, *Impressions of Turkey during Twelve Year's Wanderings* (New York, 1897), pp. 145–147.

[26] For details on relations between the Nestorian Church and the Church of England, see Coakley's *The Church of the East and the Church of England.*

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there, Cutts made a Nestorian tribe, which was attacked by the Kurds, "write out a schedule of their losses, and Mar Shimoon also desiring it, I wrote to the British Consul in Tabriz asking him to try to get these poor fellows some redress." In the concluding remarks that Cutts wrote in his 40–page report, *The Assyrian Christians*, he noted that "it is our duty not only to deliver these Eastern Christians from oppression, but also to respond to their desire for aid in the improvement of their system of education, and for counsel and encouragement in the direction of religious reform and Church revival." It might be "desirable for the Church to endeavour to induce Government to appoint a certain number of Consular Chaplains, not only for ministration to English people living in the East, but for this indirect purpose of giving aid and comfort to the Eastern Churches."[27]

The British consul at Erzerum was not unaware of the dangers that might result from these high hopes and developments; even before the arrival of the Cutts mission, the consul had written to Earl Granville that the "ignorant Nestorians" had in some measure been confirmed in their ideas to depend upon foreign protection "by the misdirected zeal of foreign Church propagandists, lay and clerical, whom they regard as Government agents, each of them seeming to set a high value on their friendship, and to look upon its acquisition in the light of an important political gain." The Nestorians, he added, "trifle with all such agents, encourage the advances made to them, and feign conviction, backing their hypocrisy with a request for spiritual instructors . . ."

The consul was not blind to the fact that the Nestorians had just causes of complaint against the "most execrable tyranny exercised upon them by the local Koords."[28] This tyranny, sometimes agitated by the Turks, was not unrelated to the contacts that the Nestorians maintained with Western missionaries.[29] These inter-confessional relations were certainly aggravated when the British military consuls arrived on the scene. An "Eastern Statesman" reported that the Kurds had adopted a new refinement of cruelty toward the Christians since the arrival of the foreign consuls, telling the Christians:

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[27] Cutts, *Christians under the Crescent*, p. 190, and his report, *The Assyrian Christians*, pp. 32–34; cf. Coakley, p. 71 and *passim*.

[28] *Parliamentary Papers*, 92 (1877), Cmd. 1739, no. 23.

[29] See *Missionary Herald*, 63 (1867), 279, and above pp. 72–85.

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"Go and tell your Consuls to come and settle with us."[30] The Kurds openly and publicly vowed that they would redouble their persecution in order to revenge the measures taken against them by Turkey at the instigation of English and Russian Consuls. Referring to the arrival of the Cutts mission, the British consul informed the Foreign Office that as a result of the intimate connection that existed in the Muslim world between the religious and political elements, the recent negotiations between the Nestorian and English churches had led to a widespread belief, both among the Nestorians themselves and the other sects, that the Nestorians are in "some special manner entitled to the protection of England; in fact, that they are virtually British subjects." These perceptions, no matter how baseless, led to an aggravation of the jealousy between the various religious and ethnic groups and to a greater mistrust of England by the Ottoman government.[31]

The Kurds Feel Threatened

The political changes that followed the agreements reached at Cyprus, the rumors of the establishment of an Armenian state, as envisioned by the Congress of Berlin in the late 1870s, and of the exceptional privileges granted to the Nestorians, prompted the Kurds to action. Once more some of their tribes united and tried to protect their interests, this time under Shaykh Ubaydullah of Shamdinan. Shaykh Ubaydullah was held in veneration and fear by Kurdish tribes on both sides of the frontier, his person and authority held more sacred than those of the Sultan. American missionaries in Urmiyah reported that the Shaykh lived in a royal way, entertaining at his gates from five hundred to one thousand visitors of all classes and that he treated his subjects with equality and justice.

At the beginning Shaykh Ubaydullah seems to have been encouraged by the Porte to assert himself against the plan to establish an autonomous Armenia and to fight for Muslims predominance in eastern Anatolia. When he was presented with an Ottoman decoration in 1880, he had told the Turkish official bearing the firman of the

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[30] An Eastern Statesman, "Contemporary Life and Thought in Turkey," *Contemporary Review*, 37 (1880), 342.

[31] *Loc. cit.*

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rumor that the Armenians were going to have an independent state in Van and that the Nestorians were going to hoist the British flag and declare themselves British subjects. He had vowed that he would never permit this from happening even if he had to arm the women.[32]

At the same time, afraid of Turkish treachery and over dependence upon England, Ubaydullah tried to act independently and, if possible, to win the moral support of Great Britain and even of her protégés the native Christians. It was rumored at this time that he had made formal proposals to the British representatives to transfer his allegiance "from the Sultan to the Empress of India."[33] He urged Mar Shamun to join him in the establishment of an independent Kurdistan and made the same request to the chief Armenian ecclesiastic. British agents on the scene had come to the conclusion that there could be little doubt that the Shaykh's object was to rid the country of the Sultan's officials, and set himself up as ruler of Kurdistan, from the southern portion of the Van vilayet to the northern portion of the vilayet of Mosul and as much further in every direction as he could extend his influence.[34] The British Consul at Tabriz reported that Ubaydullah wanted to restore order within the borders of Turkey and Persia; according to the consul's informant, Khalifah Sayid Muhammad, a brother-in-law of Ubaydullah, the Shaykh wanted to place Christians and Muslims on a footing of equality, to favor education, and allow churches and schools to be built. (Nine years previously, in 1871, the British Consul at Erzerum had described Ubaydullah as "the persistent oppressor of the Nestorians in his vicinity, the destroyer of their churches . . .")[35] All that the Kurdish chief now wanted was the moral support of the European powers, especially England, for whom he had the greatest friendship and regard. He wanted the Western powers to give him a chance; should he fail to organize Kurdistan and to establish a stable government, he was prepared to be judged by the tribunal of Europe by whose decisions he would abide.[36]

Like Nurallah before him, Ubaydullah had lately become a good friend of the American missionaries especially of their physician

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[32] "Correspondence Respecting the Kurdish Invasion of Persia," *Parliamentary Papers*, 100 (1881), Cmd. 2851, no. 7. See also *ibid.*, no. 6.

[33] An Eastern Statesman, p. 342.

[34] *Parliamentary Papers*, 100 (1881), Cmd. 2851, no. 22.

[35] *Parliamentary Papers*, 92, (1877), Cmd. 1739, no. 23. See also *Missionary Herald*, 64 (1868), 19, 284.

[36] *Parliamentary Papers*, 100 (1881), Cmd. 2851, no. 56.

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Dr. Cochran.[37] In a letter dated October 5, 1880, the Shaykh wrote the missionary doctor requesting him to inform the British government of the facts about Kurdistan. He wrote that:

> The Kurdish nation, consisting of more than 500,000 families, is a people apart. Their religion is different [from that of others], and their laws and customs are distinct. It is known among all nations as mischievous and corrupt. This is how Kurdistan has been depicted. If one person [from among them] does an evil deed, a thousand peaceable and orderly persons gain an ill repute. Be it known to you for certain that this has all been caused by the laches [sic] of the Turkish and Persian authorities, for Kurdistan is in the midst between these two countries, and both Governments, for their own reasons, do not distinguish between good and evil characters. It is thus that bad characters remain unreformed, and respectable people get an ill repute, and become ruined. Among other evil things, you have probably heard of the tribe of Ali Agha Shekak, who are famous for their evil and ruin-causing deeds—ruinous alike to native and foreign sects, Mohammedans and others. Every Government has heard of their wicked doings. Owing to neglect or want of power on the part of Persia, these people will never be civilized, and will remain in their savage state. The evil deeds of the Harkee tribe, who are Turkish subjects, are also apparent. The Ottoman Government also, like the Persian, either had not the means of civilizing these people or else neglects them. Kurdistan has got a bad reputation and has been disgraced . . . The Chiefs and Rulers of Kurdistan, whether Turkish or Persian subjects, and the inhabitants of Kurdistan, one and all are united and agreed that matters cannot be carried on in this way with the two Governments, and that necessarily something must be done, so that European Governments having understood the matter, shall inquire into our state. We also are a nation apart. We want our affairs to be in our own hands, so that in the punishment of our own offenders we may be strong and independent, and have privileges like other nations; and respecting our offenders, we are ready to take upon ourselves that no harm or damage shall accrue to any nation . . .[38]

The Kurds Revolt

Moved by a variety of motives and by famine which prevailed throughout those districts in 1880, Ubaydullah started his campaign against Persia first, probably influenced by the prevailing idea of that

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[37] For relations between Dr. Grant and Nurallah, see above, pp. 76–78.
[38] *Parliamentary Papers*, 100, (1881), Cmd. 2851, no. 47.

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country's weakness. His forces crossed the border in October 1880; earlier that summer some of the Persian Kurds had been negotiating for an independent status, perhaps in anticipation of the fall campaign. The plan was to force the Persian government to acknowledge Ubaydullah as ruler over the Persian Kurds, once he had consolidated his power, he would obtain the same concession from the Turks.[39]

At the head of about eight thousand warriors, the chief laid siege to Urmiyah while a force of about fifteen thousand men, headed by his son Abd al-Qadir, seized the town and district of Sauj Bulaq (Mahabad). The Imam of the Sunnis of Sauj Bulaq issued a *fatwa* declaring the attack of Ubaydullah as a holy war against the Shiahs. In Mianduab Kurdish armies were reported to have killed some three thousand men, women and children, mostly Shiahs. Owing to his friendship for Dr. Cochran, the Shaykh did his best to protect the Christian population of Urmiyah from indiscriminate outrage. Without the the approval of their patriarch, about three hundred Hakkari Nestorians had been pressed into his service.[40] Despite his good intentions Ubaydullah was not always able to stop his men from molesting and plundering the Christian population.

The missionaries themselves were placed in a difficult position. The Shaykh had encamped with his army in the immediate vicinity of the American College buildings. The Americans could not assume an attitude of open hostility toward him nor could they reciprocate the friendly feelings he professed toward them without arousing the suspicion of the Persian authorities. The Americans took advantage of the Shaykh's friendship and at the same time provided shelter for many of their Shiah neighbors in order to remove the prevalent impression that they were anxious only to save Christians. The American evangelists were perhaps instrumental in bringing about Ubaydullah's early downfall when, as a result of Dr. Cochran's intercession, the Shaykh postponed his assault on Urmiyah, thus giving time for the Persian troops from Tabriz to arrive and repulse him. But the Kurds' chances for success were almost negligible; they were not only opposed by the European powers but were divided among themselves. Only one month after they had crossed the Persian border disagreements and dissensions surfaced among them; some of

[39] *Ibid.*, no. 54.
[40] *Ibid.*, no. 56; S.G. Wilson, *Persia*, pp. 111–113.

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their chiefs soon showed a disposition to come to terms with Persia.[41] As early as November 1880, we read that "the whole of the Kurdish forces with Shaikh Obeidullah have taken to flight." Two months after his invasion, the Shaykh and his chiefs had withdrawn to Turkish territory for refuge. It was now the turn of the Shiahs to take vengeance on the Sunnis. Thousands of Sunni families had fled with the retreating Kurds; most of those who remained were killed, their villages burned. One of the missionaries wrote the British Consul in Tabriz that the Persian troops "were as bad as the Kurds in the wholesale pillaging and outrages."[42]

The Persian government urged the governments of both Britain and Russia to press the Porte to take energetic measures to arrest and punish Kurdish insurgents. During these disturbances the Shah hah had tried to impress upon the British ambassador the gravity of the situation, mentioning the possibility of a Russian intervention which would be used "as an excuse for the safety and interests of her numerous subjects in Azerbayjan," with fatal results to both Turkey and Persia and presumably to Great Britain.[43] (The Russian Foreign Office had informed the British Ambassador at Saint Petersburg that the Shah had asked for Russian help to restore order, but assured the British government that Russia would do nothing outside her own borders that might excite international susceptibilities.)[44]

Suspicious of a Russo-Persian raprochement, Britain pressed the Porte for the punishment of Ubaydullah while Russia did the same in accordance with Persian wishes. Turkey had no choice but to suppress the movement that it had originally agitated. Under pressure the Porte ordered Ubaydullah to Istanbul; he was able to escape from there only to be caught again, this time to be exiled to Mecca, where he died in 1883.

American-Persian Relations

The first diplomatic representative of the United States to the court of Persia was appointed in 1883, an event not unconnected with the

[41] *Parliamentary Papers*, 100 (1881), Cmd. 2851, nos. 3, 21.
[42] *Ibid.*, no. 86.
[43] *Ibid.*, no. 11.
[44] *Ibid.*, nos. 28, 32, 41.

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Kurdish movement. The danger of the Kurdish invasion to the American missionaries drew the special attention of the United States government to Persia. The month following the siege of Urmiyah, R.R. Dawes, Representative from Ohio and brother-in-law of missionary Shedd of Urmiyah, asked the State Department to appeal to the Persian government to protect the missionaries in Azerbayjan. The Congressman was notified that this matter had to be arranged through the British representative because of the absence of a United States diplomat in Persia. After the danger of the invasion had passed, Representative Andrew G. Curtin of Pennsylvania (a former United States Minister to Russia), advocated the establishment of diplomatic relations with Persia. "We have more missionaries in Persia than has any other country," he said on the floor of Congress. "Surely those of our citizens who in self-sacrifice have penetrated the darkness which has covered that historic land, given them the Bible and its precepts, and established schools, deserve the active protection of this government." In the summer of 1882 Congress passed a bill for the appointment of a consul-general and *chargé d'affaires* at Tehran. The following year the office was raised to that of minister resident and S.G.W. Benjamin, son of a former missionary to Turkey, became the first United States Minister to Persia.[45]

The Powers Shift Interest

British consular efforts in behalf of the Christians and of a more peaceful Anatolia ended in total failure. The military consuls were withdrawn from Turkey only three years after their appointment; Great Britain, more interested in Egypt, allowed the Cyprus Convention to drop more and more into the background and ordered her military consuls in Anatolia to transfer to Egypt in the summer of 1882. One of the reasons for their recall appears to have been to win Turkish consent to the British occupation of Egypt.[46]

While the British consuls were still in Anatolia and for the first

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[45] S.G. Wilson, *Persia*, pp. 123–24; A. Yeselson, *United States-Persian Diplomatic Relations, 1883–1921* (New Brunswick, 1956), pp. 23–25.

[46] Ramsay, pp. 143–146. For critical studies of British policy during this period see D.E. Lee, *Great Britain and the Cyprus Convention of 1878.* Cambridge, Mass., 1934, and M.W. Tyler, *the European Powers and the Near East, 1875–1908.* Minneapolis, 1925.

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few years following their withdrawal, conditions there were relatively peaceful. The sultan's government, mistrusting Russia, was anxious to keep on good terms with Britain; the price of British good-will was an appearance, at least, of reform along the Turko-Russian frontier. During this period the sultan found it appropriate to confer upon the Nestorian Patriarch [Mar (Ruwil) Shamun XVIII] an honorific title for loyalty. He was decorated with the order of Uthmaniyah in addition to that of Majidiyah, which he had received in the early sixties. A member of the patriarchal family was appointed on the mutasarrif's council. Mar Shamun governed his people through a council of his own, made up of close relatives who, among other things, were commissioned to go to various villages and districts to transact patriarchal business, hear complaints, settle disputes, or collect the dues. For all practical purposes the Nestorian prelate was still not only a spiritual leader but also a temporal ruler of his people and as such he was a salaried official of the Ottoman government.[47] This does not mean that an ideal situation prevailed but a semblance of order and security was temporarily established.

This tolerable situation came to an end by 1890. With Russian eyes turned toward the vast stretches of Siberia and the Far East, and with Germany as an ally, Sultan Abdul Hamid II felt that he could show, at last, the cordial dislike that he had acquired for England. He had never forgotten that Egypt was at least in nominal dependence on his crown when England occupied it only three years after she had acquired Cyprus early in his reign as a price for protecting his own Christian subjects. It was not unnatural from his viewpoint to trace the invasion and partial dismemberment of his empire in the Balkans to the Christian nationalities which his ancestors had allowed to live as religious *millets*, preserving their faith, their language and ethnic identity.[48] Now these traditions of national independence were quickened even in Asiatic Turkey into a serious menace threatening the very existence of the empire; as far as it lay within his power he would eliminate this source of danger in the future.

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[47] Bishop, II, 282; Maclean and Browne, pp. 16 188; M.S. Bell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Armenia, Kurdistan, Azerbaijan in 1885–86* (Simla, 1889), p. 407; Cutts, p. 193; H.A.G. Percy, *Highlands of Asiatic Turkey* (London, 1901), p. 266; Wigram, *Our Smallest Ally*, p. 5; Surman d'Bait Mar Shimun, *Assyrian Church Customs and the Murder of Mar Shimun* (London, 1920), *passim.*

[48] See Rafiuddin Ahmad, "A Moslem View of Abdul Hamid and the Powers," *The Nineteenth Century*, 38 (July 1895), 156–164.

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Increased Lawlessness

To resolve the problem in Anatolia, Abdul Hamid resorted to the exploitation of the tribes. The withdrawal of the British military consuls from Asiatic Turkey paved the way for a Turkish-Kurdish alliance. The sultan now tolerated the local independence of the obedient Kurdish aghas, and organized their men into irregular formations that bore his name, "The Hamidiyah Cavalry." He allowed them to carry on their exactions wearing the uniform of the regular army. They were to be a match to the Armenian revolutionary organizations, supported from outside Turkey, as well as to counteract small-scale Russian and Persian movements on Turkish soil. Responsible only to the sultan, the Hamidiyah was free from the authority of the local government; its officers could be tried only by a regular court-martial; even provincial governors were reported afraid of taking action against the Hamidiyah without express orders from the Sublime Porte.

The consequence of giving Kurdish tribes this extraordinary license under the guise of a semimilitary organization was increased lawlessness. The condition of the country now became decidedly worse than it had been for a long time. The student of Kurdistan and eastern Anatolia during this period, whether he reads consular reports, missionary accounts, or memoirs of Turkish or European travelers will hear the same story of disorder, incompetence, murder, and plunder repeated until his sensitivities are numbed and he starts accepting this state of affairs as a matter of course. "Wherever one traveled," wrote an observer, "from merchant, from government official and from army officer, there was one bitter cry: 'our country is ruined.'"[49] In 1890, the sultan's own minister of public works, Husayn Fahmi Pasha, in a report to his sovereign deplored the state of the empire in the eastern provinces; he spoke of famine, depopulated villages, and ruined provinces.[50] Only two years after the organization of the Hamidiyah, a British "Confidential" reported that the situation in eastern Anatolia "was so bad" that Muslim merchants of Erzerum had addressed a strongly-worded telegram to the imperial palace complaining that the state of insecurity in their province

[49] E.W. MacDowell, "The Ancient Nestorian Church and Its Present Influence in Kurdistan," *The Journal of Race Development*, 2 (1911), 77.

[50] See J.E. Driault, *Problèmes politiques et sociaux* (Paris, 1907), p. 160.

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was rapidly bringing all business to a standstill, ruining the population. Arshak Safrastian, who served as a British vice-consul noted that the Kurdish cavalry divisions became a scourge to all indiscriminately. Even Sunnite Kurds were not spared since many of the Hamidiyah recruits came from Shi'ite Kurdish tribes.[51]

In the case of the Nestorians, the problem was largely that of the surrounding Kurdish tribes. Out-armed and out-numbered, the Nestorian tribes gradually came to believe that the Turks were using the Kurds to exterminate them.[52] The general lawlessness, the frequent raids and robberies made life unbearable during the last decade of the century. The fact that a representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury had resided "permanently" at the patriarch's village since 1886 did not help matters. The Turkish governors sent gendarmes to the village "again and again to see what was being done and to endeavor to annoy Mar Shamon and his people into wishing the Englishmen to quit the neighborhood."[53] As late as 1908, the British ambassador's report on Turkey stated that in the summer of that year a Kurdish raid upon the Nestorians had left 11,000 victims homeless.[54] That same year an Anglican clergyman wrote that in spite of the fact that the average Turk did not approve of Kurdish disorders, the Nestorians living in the vicinity of the Kurds "have hardly been able to call their soul their own and have had no inducement to toil for anything but the bare necessities of life."[55]

The Nestorians of Urmiyah had their share of troubles. Living between two weak, ill-governed states, in an unsettled borderland, the peaceful inhabitants of Urmiyah, Christians and Muslims alike, were exposed to Kurdish raids that rendered life and property more insecure than in any other part of the country. The fact that the Kurdish tribes involved were divided on both sides of the frontier and that sectarian differences existed between Persia and Turkey,

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[51] See Mark Sykes, *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, pp. 321–406. For a précis and translation of statements made by Kurds against the Hamidiyah, see F.O. 424, no. 187, pp. 149–50 and no. 175, Confidential 6447, p. 178. Sometimes the persecuted Kurdish tribes and villagers were those that refused to attack Christians because it was "contrary to common practice." Sykes notes that the protection of Christians was considered one of the "traditional customes of the tribe."

[52] Maclean and Browne, p. 38.

[53] F.N. Heazell and Mrs. Margoliouth, eds., *Kurds and Christians* (London, 1913), pp. 22, 132, 174.

[54] G.P. Gooch and H.W.V. Temperley, eds., *British Documents on the Origin of the War, 1989, 1914* (London, 1930), v, 304.

[55] Heazell and Margoliouth, p. 174.

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made pacification of the frontier even more difficult. The air seems always to have been rife with rumors of dire calamities about to happen. As autumn advanced Kurdish raids became more numerous; this was the season, explained the British Consul at Tabriz, when "the harvest is just over" and the Kurds "are collecting their provisions for the winter."[56] Shedd wrote that just as the Nestorians finish gathering the products of field and vineyard, "the Kurdish hordes came upon them as suddenly as a mountain storm."[57]

Kurds Themselves Maligned, Exploited

The Kurdish tribes were themselves victims of the hard conditions under which they lived. During the whole of this history they had suffered from their geographical position between two and sometimes three mutually hostile powers who occupied their country without showing them any consideration or sympathy. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century their country was penetrated as never before. The subject matter of this chapter illustrates how they were either neglected or exploited by their own government while the European powers thought only of their "subjugation." In the words of a Kurdish nationalist, the Kurd, "unlike the Christian, had neither the right nor the opportunity to complain of his lot, either to the Government, which was nominally at least his own, or the world." He was used by the Turkish ruler "as his agent against the Armenian and . . . it was primarily the Kurd who was denounced before civilization as a marauder and murderer."[58]

The misunderstanding of the Kurdish tribal society stems partly from the fact that the sedentary among them have been grouped indiscriminately with their nomadic and semi-nomadic brothers even though the three groups are entirely different social classes. Divided into several large divisions, with countless subdivisions of tribes and clans, each under its petty chief (*agha*), the great majority of the Kurds lived a relatively quiet life in their mountain villages, pursuing lawful occupations. Sedentary Kurds lived in villages on their own land, cultivating the soil, grazing their flocks on the surround-

[56] *Parliamentary Papers*, 100 (1881), Cmd. 2851, no. 55.
[57] *Annual Report* of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, 1881, p. 45.
[58] S. Bedr Khan, p. 30.

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ing hills, keeping their sheep and goats in their houses in winter.[59] They were, and are, industrious and ingenious agriculturalists, cultivating every available piece of ground in the vicinity of their villages. People who have lived among them often describe them as quick to make friends, for the most part warmhearted, and usually loyal in friendship.[60]

As in all relatively isolated societies,[61] Kurdish villagers, just as their Christian neighbors, tended to be self-sufficient, the family manufacturing much of its own goods. Nearly all the cloth they used, for instance, was of their own manufacture. The cold winters called for heavy clothing and quilts, which were usually made by men, whereas the shirts and skirts and men's cotton pants were made by the women.[62] The men and boys joined the womenfolk in preparing the yarn for the hand looms, the men specializing in weaving warm blankets in large plaids.[63]

The Kurds also wove carpets from the strong coarse wool of their large-tailed sheep, which, as all who are familiar with their handiwork know, are very durable, lasting from generation to generation.[64] An artistic people like their Persian cousins, the Kurds produced carpets with some of the most beautiful designs and finest weaving. They made their saddlebags the same way, together with shawls, socks, and warm gloves.[65] Not all carpets were made for one's own

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[59] C.H. Wheeler, *Ten Years on the Euphrates* (Boston, 1868), p. 46; B. Dickson, *ibid.*, 361; Mark Sykes, "The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire," *Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland Journal*, 38 (1908), 475, where he describes one tribal confederation as "partly complete nomads, partly completely sedentary, and partly semi-nomadic." See also Shākir Khasbak, *al-Akrād, Dirāsah Jughrāfīyah Ithnughrāfīyāh* (Baghdad, 1972), p. 272; Derk Kinnane, *The Kurds and Kurdistan* (London, 1964), pp. 8–20.

[60] Sykes, *ibid.*, p. 454. See also Blanche W. Stead, "Kurdistan for Christ," *Muslim World*, 10 (1920): 248.

[61] As in most of the other provinces of the Ottoman empire the Kurdish regions were inhabited by peoples of varying nationalities and religious sects. Each separate village maintained its own characteristics and identity, setting it apart from its neighboring villages.

[62] Stead, "Kurdistan for Christ," 243; Khasbak, *al-Akrād*, pp. 335–44.

[63] In Kurdish society men and women often work together, women holding property with equal rights and enjoying considerably more freedom than their Turkish, Arab, and Persian sisters. See Stead, *ibid.*, p. 248, Kinnane, *The Kurds and Kurdistan*, p. 13. For a detailed discussion of the Kurdish women, see Khasbak, *al-Akrad* pp. 426–53, and Henry H. Hansen, *The Kurdish Woman's Life: Field Research in a Muslim Society, Iraq* (Copenhagen, 1961); H.R. al-Jawashli, *al-Hayāt al-Ijtimā'īyah fi Kurdistān* (Baghdad, 1970).

[64] Wheeler, *Ten Years on the Euphrates*, p. 46; Sykes, "Kurdish Tribes," p. 468.

[65] See Stead, "Kurdistan for Christ," p. 241.

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use. During the nineteenth century especially, carpet companies formed by exporters, established branches throughout Anatolia and allotted work to the villagers. In these cases the villagers did not have to fleece their own wool and prepare their own dye; the company provided a loom and pattern as well as all the material. They paid the family by the yard; an industrious household could finish a good-size rug in less than a year. Where the Kurds were settled in fertile regions such as northwestern Iran or northeastern Iraq or south-central Anatolia, and enjoyed an abundance of food, varied with vegetables and fruits, their condition translated into a settled existence, and harmonious intercommunication with the surrounding non-Kurdish communities as well as with the government.[66]

Many of the tribes had permanent villages as well as seasonal encampments. They attended to the production of flocks and herds, and provided the country with milk, butter and cheese, wool, meat, hides, and tallow, and supplied it with wheat, barley, and maize, as well as fruit from their orchards and vineyards. People who have known them have described them as an especially busy society, where the women were up before daybreak churning the previous day's milk to make butter, while the men and boys at the peak of the day brought out the flocks and herds, readied them for milking before sending them off to pasture where the younger boys would shepherd them. The day's work had just started; it would not end until sunset.[67]

The semi-sedentary Kurds did little cultivating, but they owned large flocks; they lived in tents on their own hills in the summer, and wintered in villages in the valleys. Their farming was limited to the cultivation of wheat, tobacco, and barley, both in their winter and summer homes. They excelled as smiths, weavers, and tentmakers.[68] The purely nomadic Kurds lived in their tents throughout the year. They too owned large flocks of sheep, goats, mules, and horses, but no land. By ancient custom they had the right to graze their flocks in certain well-defined pastures, and ancient rights of

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[66] Hogarth, p. 193; Leon Dominian, "The Peoples of Northern and Central Asiatic Turkey," *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* (New York), 47 (1915), 857.

[67] Stead, "Kurdistan for Christ," 242–244.

[68] *Ibid.*, 244; see also Dickson, "Journeys in Kurdistan," p. 365; Sykes describes some semi-nomadic tribes as "wealthy shepherds"—see his "Kurdish Tribes," pp. 453–55.

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way allowed them to get to them in their annual migrations. Oftentimes their rights were challenged by the powerful chief of a sedentary tribe, who imposed tolls on them, while they insisted on their rights and resisted. Often an irritated Turkish governor would send a strong force into Kurdish villages that might have been innocent, the Turkish soldiers committing every kind of atrocity, burning the village and putting most of its inhabitants to the sword. Such treatment, instead of "teaching them a lesson," produced the conviction among the Kurds that they could rightfully plunder and oppose the Turkish government whenever they could with impunity.[69]

[69] *Ibid.*, 36; see also Stead, p. 245; F.O. 424/132, inclosure 2 in no. 103 (Diarbekir, 30 April 1882), p. 139, describing the Turkish government's method of "treating a whole tribe as rebels on account of some black sheep." Consul Chermside wrote of "wholesale retaliation in sacking and destroying villages." *Ibid.*

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CHAPTER SIX

THE CALM AND THE STORM

"Year after year," wrote physician-missionary William Ambrose Shedd at the close of the nineteenth century, "the ties which bind us to Europe, and especially Russia, are strengthening. The hand of Russia is all-powerful in Persia."[1] As a result of this proximity the Nestorians began to acquire a renewed sense of Russia's power and a conviction of its future supremacy. Before too long, they tried to secure the aid of their coreligionists to the north and almost succeeded. Under the leadership of the only Nestorian bishop in Urmiyah, an extensive petition was carried to Saint Petersburg in which they expressed the desire to renounce their theological "errors" and to join the Russian Orthodox Church. In response to the petition, a committee of investigation, made up of a few Russian priests and monks was sent to Azerbayjan in May 1897. The dream that the Christian Persians had been cherishing for decades seemed to be coming true.

The Russian ecclesiastics were welcomed with boundless enthusiasm. The American missionaries in Urmiyah wrote the Board in New York that the Russian clergy were "making a leisurely and triumphal procession through the villages," making all sorts of absurd promises, e.g.: The Christians would be the new overlords; the land would be given to them; those who did not join the Russian Orthodox Church would have their property confiscated and would be banished to Siberia; the American Protestants would also be banished to Siberia.[2] From ten to fifteen thousand villagers signed a petition which began with these words:

> "In the name of the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit, By the Grace of the Life-giving Holy Spirit, we, the Syrio-Chaldean people, followers of Nestorius, determine to unite again with the Greco-Russian, one, true, holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church, to unite free from deceit or insincerity, in truth and with a right heart, according to the words of

[1] *Annual Report* of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, 1899, pp. 195–197.
[2] Letter of the Rev. Frederick G. Coan to the Board, September 11, 1897.

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> our Great Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, that 'there shall be one flock and one shepherd.' Our fathers and ancestors, fourteen centuries ago were separated from the unity of the Church, but hereafter let this division and separation not be, between our Nestorians and the Orthodox."[3]

The reason for this landslide was purely political; the people believed that the mission, if not in itself political in purpose, was the forerunner of a great political transformation. As a Nestorian priest had put it, he "would accept whatever Church wielded the biggest club." The United States Minister in Tehran explained the situation to the Department of State succinctly: "The neighboring presence of Russian power which is ultimately expected to occupy the province [of Azerbayjan] has given rise to a general unrest which since it cannot manifest itself in political revolution, finds its outlet in a religious movement by which it hopes to realize its desires."[4]

Partly as a result of their enthusiasm, the Nestorians were finally admitted into the Russian Church; the Church sent a mission to Urmiyah in the fall of 1898. A telegram of congratulations from the Tsar was read at the ceremony celebrating the proselytizing; the emperor asked for the blessings of the newly received bishop. All the old Nestorians of Persia, a large proportion of their Catholic brethren, and a fourth or fifth of the Protestants are reported to have joined the Russian Orthodox Church. *The Times* of London reported that "thousands of Nestorians have adopted the Greco-Russian tenets in the hope of enjoying some day Russian protection;" the newspaper commented that this move on the part of the Russian Church annulled the boast of Ober-Procurator Pobiedonosteff that the Russian Church was the most liberal in the world because it never proselytized.[5]

What of the Western missions, some of whom had been laboring among the Nestorians for over half a century? The Anglicans, who by now were also firmly established in Urmiyah, moved their headquarters to Van in Turkey. The United States Minister in Tehran advised his countrymen to withdraw since Russian control of north-

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[3] For the translation, see Samuel G. Wilson, "Conversion of the Nestorians of Persia to the Russian Church," *Missionary Review*, 12 (1899), 746–747; cf. Maleck, p. 342. For details see Coakley, *Church of the East*, pp. 220 *seq.*

[4] United States of America, Department Documents (National Archives), Despatches 10 (1899), March 27, 1899.

[5] *The Times*, July 3, 1899; Wilson "Conversion of the Nestorians," p. 752.

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west Persia would be complete sooner or later.[6] In a few years, however, as a result both of the Russo-Japanese war of 1905—in which Russia was defeated—and of other troubles at home, Russian Orthodox enthusiasm diminished and so did the Nestorian zeal to join them. In 1905 a congregation left the Russian Church to join the United Lutheran Church of America, which maintained a few Nestorian priests under the supervision of an American missionary. Other Western-supported congregations began to proliferate early in the twentieth century. A Sweedish-American "Augustana Synode" employed a Nestorian priest who conducted two day-schools. The Evangelican Association for the Advancement of the Nestorian Church, founded at Berlin in 1906, employed a Nestorian priest who had a Lutheran training in Germany. For about 10 years a German *Orient mission* maintained an orphanage outside Urmiyah for Nestorian refugees from the mountains. The English Plymouth Brethren employed a few priests in a mission of their own. Other smaller missions were connected with the American Dunkards, the Holiness Methodists, the American Southern Baptists and Northern Baptists, and the English Congregationalists.[7] There was perhaps no missionary field in the world where there were so many rival "Christian" forces at work as were found in Urmiyah at the beginning of this century, all struggling to get predominance among these few people. Some of the results of this unseemly struggle were demoralization, arrogance on the part of the Persian Christians, the transformation of religion into a sport and trade. These factors lowered the Muslims' respect for the Christian community and increased their jealous resentment of the self-assertiveness and the prosperity of their neighbors.

Progress at a Price

Also as a result of this spirited program of religious and secular education, a considerable change was taking place in the social and intellectual condition of the Nestorians. They learned anew to cherish their language and historical tradition in spite of the fact that

[6] Labaree letter to the Board, March 3, 1899.

[7] See "Persia" in *Catholic Encyclopedia* XI, 725; *Annual Report* of Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, 1911, p. 323.

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their small community was split into denominations often antagonistic to each other. Their acquaintance with Western ideas of political, social, and economic progress resulted in the development of an active discontent with their lot and an acute sense of superiority over their Muslim neighbors. The young men became restless and wanted to better themselves by studying and working abroad, especially in Russia and America. Many settled permanently in these countries, supporting their relatives back home through regular remittances. Others returned to Persia to engage in trade; they bought vineyards and orchards and built good homes.

These socioeconomic changes were often accompanied by problems. Several of those who returned from America did so as naturalized American citizens and in the country of their birth claimed the protection of the United States government. When molested they complained to the American consulate. Oftentimes these U.S. representatives took the position that the guilty be punished, and this galled the authorities. The United States officials in Turkey where the Armenians were the "Americans," gave these litigious disputes as one of the main reasons why the Ottoman government was opposed to American missionaries.[8] The governments of both Persia and Turkey refused to acknowledge in any official way the right of naturalized citizens to appeal to the protection of the United States. American authorities officially insisted that their government expected "for its naturalized citizens sojourning in a foreign country the same fair and impartial treatment that is accorded the citizens or subjects of other nations residing in that foreign country."[9] Eventually the problem was resolved by discouraging citizens naturalized in the United States from returning to their land of birth, but for several years this dispute was the cause of much intergroup tension. In one case, such a dispute led in 1904 to local and international complications so serious that they merit a brief mention here.

It was the first murder of an American connected with the Urmiyah mission. Benjamin W. Labaree was killed by Kurds of the Dasht tribe at the instigation of a provoked *sayyid.*[10] Before this premedi-

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[8] United States of America, *Foreign Relations 1884*, p. 569.

[9] See Acting Secretary of State Adee's note to the American Legation at Tehran, Numerical File 5931/482–3, September 29, 1909.

[10] A descendant of the Prophet Muhammad through al-Husayn, son of Fatimah, the only surviving child of the Prophet; she was married to Ali, the only Caliph

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tated killing, the missionaries, in conjunction with the Anglican mission, had pressed the matter of the punishment of the sayyid in question for the unprovoked murder of a Nestorian who was a British subject.[11] The cleric was, according to the Persian law then prevailing, immune from the kind of punishment insisted upon by the missionaries. The attempt by a few foreign Christians to have a Muslim dignitary brought to justice aroused strong resentment among the majority. The United States Minister in Tehran, with the help of the more influential British delegation, tried in vain to reach a satisfactory solution. The Minister finally suggested that American warships be sent to the Persian Gulf, since words were useless without the threat of force. The idea did not appeal to the Department of State but President Theodore Roosevelt was reported to be "greatly disturbed" and would bring the matter before Congress unless "immediate satisfaction" was given.[12]

The case seemed to have been resolved when the American Minister wrote that the sayyid was imprisoned for life and that the Persian government would pay the American widow $30,000 instead of the $16,000 she had asked for. The missionaries refused to consider the case closed; they insisted on death penalty for the murderers. The Department of State, in agreement with them, started to use strong language again, demanding that the redress of "this heinous case" be effectively exemplary. The missionaries soon reversed their position, afraid of "the blood feud that these savages would have to follow," but the change of mind came a little too late. At the insistence of the United States Minister at Tehran, the Persian government sent 1,500 troops to Azerbayjan to capture the Kurdish accomplices. This was not an easy matter; the Kurdish tribe involved had conveniently escaped into Turkish territory.

Three years after the murder had been committed the United States Minister in Tehran wrote that the sayyid had died in prison; this, together with the fact that Mrs. Labaree had been compensated, seemed to be sufficient reason for closing the case, but new complications revived it. When the Persians sent their expedition against the Kurds, Turkish troops attacked Persia claiming that "the

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that the Shi'ah recognize of the first four caliphs that the Sunnites consider "Rightly-Guided."

[11] M.E. Shedd, *The Measure of a Man* (New York, 1922), p. 79.

[12] For details of this case see Yeselson, pp. 68–84.

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expedition was merely a pretext to invade Turkish territory." The American Consul at Tabriz wired Washington D.C.: "Turkish troops and Kurds attacking Urumia. Americans in grave peril. Recommend protest Constantinople."[13] The American Ambassador at Istanbul assured the Department that the Persians were alarmed unduly; that the Turkish attack was confined to a portion of a disputed territory between the two countries, about ten miles north of Urmiyah; that the Turks would not attack Persian territory. He explained that both Turkey and Russia were interested in portions of this disputed strip which controlled a pass of great strategic importance to either side in the event of war.[14]

But Turkish troops did attack Persian territory; they advanced until practically the whole country west of Urmiyah was in their hands. Unrestrained, the Dashtis, together with other Kurdish tribes, made the best of a chaotic situation. In a letter to the American Consul in Tabriz, missionary Shedd wrote in the summer of 1907 that the Nestorians of the Kurdish region of Persia "have been driven from their homes and have lost practically everything they possessed . . . the whole region is plunged into terror." Shedd admitted that what prevented the Persians from coming to an agreement with the Kurds was the Labaree case and the missionaries were blamed by both Kurds and Persians for the further prosecution of that case.[15] Murtaza Khan, the Persian Minister in Washington, in a note to the Department of State blamed the United States for his country's misfortunes.

The Department must have been relieved when it heard from its Minister in Tehran that the Dasht Kurds wanted to return to Persia if they would not be prosecuted for the Labaree murder. Secretary of State Elihu Root informed the Minister in February 1908 that the U.S. government had already relinquished demand for punishment of accessories of the murder of Labaree, leaving Persian law to take effect if the murderers return. "If the Persian government believes high considerations of national welfare counsel non-prosecution we will not raise objections."[16]

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[13] United States of America, State Department Documents (National Archives), Numerical File 5931/32 August 5, 1907.

[14] *Ibid.*, Numerical File 5931/198, April 29, 1908.

[15] *Ibid.*, Numerical File 5931/82–86, August 5, 1907; 5931/71–74, August 8, 1907.

[16] Yeselson, p. 79. For interesting details, see Coakley, pp. 247–250.

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Russians Occupy Azerbayjan

Conditions in Persia during the first decade of the twentieth century were further complicated by the Persian Revolution. The disorders that followed that movement led to the direct interference of Russia in Persian affairs and to Russian control of Azerbayjan, which according to the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 formed part of the Russian sphere of influence. By 1910 Russia had eight battalions of infantry and a division of Cossacks stationed in detachments at Tabriz, Urmiyah, Khoi, and Dilman, with posts at Maku, Maraghah, and Sauj Bulaq.[17] Threatened by a revolution at home, Russia incited or aided the reactionaries in Tehran to overthrow the Constitution and in 1911 and 1912 terrorized Tabriz, executing the Persian constitutional leaders and persecuting their followers with contempt.

In Urmiyah, the Russian consul was the supreme authority in most affairs and did not hesitate on occasion to exercise authority without the mediation of the Persian officials. "A hint from him is more effectual than an order from the Persian Government," wrote Shedd, "and the former is often the cause of the latter." With the strengthening of Russia's position, the Russian Church mission began to regain some of its pre-1905 prestige. Referring to the head of Russian Orthodox Church mission, the American missionary wrote that "the impression here [in Urmiyah] is that there is no one who does not stand in awe of the Archimandrite."[18] With the aid of the Russian Cossacks, he had arrested some of the leading Muslims, treating them with great indignity.[19] Besides fomenting the natural spirit of intrigue and instability and increasing the mutual jealousies between the Muslims and Christians, the Russian mission also encouraged differences and quarrels among the various sects into which the Christian community was divided. The "evangelical Nestorians," who had withstood proselytizing, were particularly victimized. When pleading and preaching failed to change them, their rivals resorted to persecution. In villages where the Protestants formed a minority, they were not allowed water to irrigate their fields; their pasturage was turned over to the village herds, and landlords were encouraged to subject them to heavy taxation.[20]

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[17] Allen and Muratoff, p. 230.
[18] M.E. Shedd, p. 89.
[19] F.G. Coan, *Yesterdays in Persia and Kurdistan* (Claremont, California, 1939), p. 244.
[20] *Annual Report* of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, 1914, p. 337.

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Despite these petty acts, the condition of the Nestorians just before the First World War was by far better than it had ever been. The native Christians as well as the various Western missions recognized Russia as the source of law and order. The presence of Russian calvary detachments throughout the province not only kept the Persian Kurds quiet but had a strong deterrent influence on Turkish Kurds as well. The Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, writing after the First World War was over, noted that just before the war "the condition of the Evangelical Church and the economic situation of the Assyrians[21] as a whole were probably better than they had ever been." The Evangelical Church had a communicant membership of about three thousand with about an equal number of adherents. Besides a good school system, "higher education was cared for in the Urumia College and Fiske Seminary, two of the best known and most fruitful institutions of modern missions." The mission hospital served and influenced the whole of western Persia and eastern Kurdistan.[22]

As for the Ottoman Nestorians, proclamations of democracy and demonstrations of fraternity by the Young Turks soon proved to be a disappointment. The government found it convenient to encourage the anti-Christian feelings which had increased after Young Turk proclamations of Muslim-Christian equality.[23] The Young Turks were as apprehensive as their predecessors of the embarrassing and dangerous position that their Christian subjects occupied along the Russian frontier. The Russians had again started to interfere in behalf of their coreligionists in eastern Turkey. As late as May 23, 1914 the minister of foreign affairs, Sazanov, was assuring members of the Imperial Duma that because of their contiguity to Russia, "The Eastern provinces of Anatolia" could not be neglected. The minister had demanded "fresh guarantees" from the Young Turks "for the peaceful development of the Christian population of Eastern Anatolia." He revealed to the Duma that an arrangement had been

[21] For a discussion of the origins of the term Assyrian, see above, pp. 17–19.

[22] Speer and Carter, pp. 467–468.

[23] See "Correspondence Respecting the Constitutional Movement in Turkey, 1908," *Parliamentary Papers* 105, (1909), Cmd. 4529, no. 99; Roderic H. Davison, "Turkish Attitudes Concerning Christian-Muslim Equality in the Nineteenth Century," *The American Historical Review*, 59 (1954), 844–864; Ahmed Emin, *Turkey in the World War* (New Haven, 1930), pp. 193–197; Heazell and Margoliouth, pp. 204–208; Wigram, *Assyrians*, p. 208; Bishop, II, 278f.; H. Kohn, *A History of Nationalism in the East* (London, 1929), p. 228.

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made with Turkey whereby the "seven vilayets" of eastern Anatolia would be divided into two districts at the head of which would be a European Inspector-General "chosen by the Porte from among the candidates recommended by the Powers."[24] In the summer of 1913 the British Ambassador in Saint Petersburg reported that Russia could not "tolerate a chronic state of disorder and anarchy"[25] across her frontier.

The Nestorians had also drawn the suspicion of the Young Turks as a result of the proselytizing of their brethren in Urmiyah to the Russian Orthodox Church.[26] At first opposed to such a movement, the Nestorians of eastern Anatolia, seeing that their independent status was daily vanishing, started making appeals to Russia, submitting to the Russian Orthodox Church "after the example of their kin in Persia."[27]

The First World War

Russia's occupation of Azerbayjan, the distribution of her troops throughout the province, and the existence of a railway connecting Tabriz with the Caucasus gave the Tabriz-Urmiyah region a new importance and created there new strategic problems in the event of war. The position offered especially brilliant possibilities for Russia in the event of an offensive against Turkey; both Turkey and Russia treated northwestern Persia as a necessary part of their military operations long before the First World War started. When the conflict did erupt the first actual hostilities between the troops of these two countries took place on the soil of neutral Persia.

At the beginning of the war the Caucasus front was a secondary theater of war to Russia; her command was chiefly occupied with the problems of the Polish and Galician fronts. To the Turks, on the other hand, the front in Transcaucasia was of major interest. Here they had concentrated their troops even before war was formally declared; after it started, they were able by mid December 1914 to set the stage for their ambitious but ill-fated offensive at

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[24] Gooch and Temperley, x, i, 796.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 486, see also pp. 493, 507.
[26] Percy, *Highlands*, pp. 202–223.
[27] Wigram, *Assyrians*, p. 176.

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Sarikamish. The campaign was under the personal command of Enver Pasha and his German Chief of Staff, General Bronsart von Schellendorf. Here Enver's far-reaching political ambitions were implemented in a grandiose military action which among other things would bring Georgia, Azerbayjan, and Armenia as autonomous provinces under Turkey and thus prepare the way for the achievement of the pan-Turanian dream of the Young Turks.[28]

During the last days of December 1914, the Turkish offensive so threatened Russian communications in Persia that all Russian forces in that country were ordered to withdraw.[29] They began to move out of Urmiyah on January 2, 1915—at the height of the fighting at Sarikamish—and the Turks entered the town two days later. In a few days most of Azerbayjan was in the possession of Turkish forces which included a large number of Kurdish irregulars. The whole population of the province, Christian and Muslim, was in peril; the prosperous villages of the Christians were the prize booty. Numerous bands of Kurds appeared all over the country around Lake Urmiyah, the chief marauder in the field being Ismail Agha Simko, a former Russian ally.

Panic-stricken, about ten thousand Nestorians fled northward that winter in the wake of the retreating Russian army. The remainder left their villages behind and took refuge at the various missions. About 3,000 were in the French Catholic mission and not less than 17,000 found shelter in the enlarged premises of the American mission; a few others found refuge in homes of Muslim friends and neighbors. But it was the score of the American missionaries here that stands out; they performed one of the most heroic achievements of the war. They proved to be the real saviors of the Christian Persians; during the long war years they also fed from their meager stores thousands of starving Kurds and Persian Muslims. These missionaries had always stood for beneficent service but it was during that war when they won the affection and respect of all; among the Nestorians this feeling became deep and lasting.

With the arrival of the refugees, the Americans took over about fifty of the adjoining Nestorian compounds, broke passages through

[28] Lt. Col. J.G. Montgomery, "A Study of Military Operations in Eastern Anatolia and the Southern Caucasus During the Great War" (Unpublished paper submitted as a requirement for the Turkish Area and Language Program of the United States Army, Princeton, 1952).

[29] Allen and Muratoff, pp. 296–301.

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the party-walls and blocked up their street entrances; they left no way in or out of their expanded domain except the single gateway into their original yard, above which floated the flag of the neutral U.S.A. For the thousands who had crowded into this asylum the Americans at once undertook their keep, making contracts with the Muslim bakers of the town, buying, transporting, and distributing about five tons of bread a day. For five months these thousands were confined here, but in safety.

The mortality rate was high as a result of the crowded and unsanitary quarters but a worse fate awaited them outside. The man who carried the chief responsibility during these chaotic days was Dr. William A. Shedd, born in Urmiyah where his father had been a missionary before him. He was aided by his co-workers, while the American Consuls at Tabriz and Tiflis, the Ambassador at Istanbul, and the Department of State in Washington did all they could to help. President Woodrow Wilson, who did not declare war on Turkey partly because of his friendship with the missionaries who served throughout the Ottoman empire, sent a special demand to the Turkish government that American interests in Urmiyah not be endangered.[30] At the same time the missionaries depended a great deal on the good will and protection of the leading Urmiyah Muslims and a few Kurdish chiefs whom they had befriended through medical and relief services.

After the defeat of the Turks at Sarikamish, where some 70,000 of their soldiers perished, the Russians reoccupied Urmiyah in May (1915). "Our hearts beat to the measure of the Psalmist's music," wrote Mrs. Shedd: "Yea, though I abide in the Valley of the Shadow, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me." Those who had escaped death returned to their empty and ruined homes where they continued to receive help. The Russians also rendered aid; in some cases they assisted individual Christians in taking private vengeance on Muslims for injuries suffered during the Turkish occupation. But hardly had three months passed when word came that the Russians were about to evacuate Urmiyah again.

Encouraged by Russian reversals in Poland and in an effort to recover ground lost the previous winter, the Turks went into action again in early July 1915. With strong reinforcements they forced the

[30] "Urmiah" [anonymous editorial], *The Independent*, 82 (1915), 57.

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Russians once again to order a general withdrawal along their front.[31] This time the entire Christian population started en masse toward Russia, leaving behind what they had reclaimed during the previous three months. In a few weeks the Turkish advance was halted and so was the flight of the people. Luckily their escape this time had taken place in summer. They returned to their plundered villages having lost hundreds to disease and pestilence. Hardly had they resettled when some 35,000 of their brethren from Hakkari descended upon them, hungry and ill-clad.

Nestorians Flee Hakkari

Partly as a result of the proclamation of the *Jihad* (holy war), troubles multiplied in Kurdistan; their passions and sense of revenge aroused by the religious injunction, Muslims intensified their vengeance against the Christians. The Ottoman government had tried in vain to secure the patriarch's loyalty; members of Mar Shamun's family who urged a more conciliatory policy toward the Turks were killed by their kinsmen in cold blood. Under the leadership of their patriarch the tribes fled their ancestral homegrounds, seeking refuge within the Russian lines in Salmas and Urmiyah. On their way there about a third of them perished.

In the next swing of fortune it was Russia that had the upper hand. By the beginning of 1916 Turkey was no longer militarily capable of protecting her frontiers; demands on her military resources were becoming enormous. On the other hand, the Russian army in the Caucasus was considerably reinforced. The importance of the Caucasian front had been steadily increasing in the eyes of the Russian government; it promised the best results for the least expenditure of effort. With the easing of pressure in Europe due to a stabilized front, Russia was able to turn more attention southward toward her age-old dream of Constantinople. (As a result of negotiations which took place in London and Petrograd in the spring of 1916, the Allied governments had come to an agreement regarding the future of delimitation of their respective zones of influence and territorial acquisitions in Asiatic Turkey. According to the agreement

[31] Montgomery, p. 86.

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Russia would obtain the provinces of Erzerum, Trabizond, Van, Bitlis, as well as territory in the southern part of Kurdistan, along the line of Mush-Sert-Jazirat Ibn-Umar-Amadiyah, Persian frontier.)[32] The Russian contingent in Azerbayjan was strengthened and a new expeditionary force was sent under General Baratoff for the protection of Persia against a Turko-German invasion.[33] The Russians helped the Nestorian refugees from Hakkari and urged them to join up with them. Under the leadership of one of their own leaders, Agha Patrus, they rendered invaluable service as advance guards and scouts to the Russians.

In the winter of 1916 the Russians were able to start their offensive which resulted in the fall of Erzerum, key to the Turkish defenses of eastern Anatolia, and were poised to threaten the heart of Asiatic Turkey. Then they advanced to capture Trabizond, the only Turkish seaport in the entire theater of operations in eastern Anatolia and Caucasus. With these victories the whole of the Van region came into Russian hands; the Turks were cut off from their forces across the Persian frontier and south of Lake Urmiyah. Baratoff's forces in Persia were able to take the towns of Hamadan and Sultanabad and by the end of February 1916 had reached Kermanshah and Khanaqin within the border of present-day Iraq. For a while there had been a possibility of a Russian advance on Baghdad.[34] The extreme lengthening of the Russian line, however, was halted after the fall of Kut to the advancing British forces in southern Iraq. The Russians gradually fell back owing to Turkish counterattacks under Ihsan Pasha. In 1915 Russian operations through Kurdistan had resulted in untold suffering for the Muslim population, especially the Kurds, whom the Russians particularly wanted to overawe.[35] Wherever they went the Russians left the innocent Muslim population impoverished and hostile. Plundered of all the food that they possessed, deprived of their cattle, flocks, and transport animals, thousands died of famine. When

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[32] See. F.S. Cocks, *The Secret Treaties and Understandings* (London, n.d.), pp. 44–45; C.J. Smith, Jr., *The Russian Struggle for Power, 1914–1917* (New York, 1956), pp. 374–375.

[33] See Allen and Muratoff, p. 324; Montgomery, p. 88; A.T. Wilson, *Loyalties Mesopotamia*, 1914–1917 (Oxford, 1930), p. 161.

[34] Wilson, *Loyalties*, pp. 184, n. 2, 216. See also Allen and Muratoff, pp. 430–435; *Times History*, x, 248.

[35] Allen and Muratoff, pp. 299–9300; Wilson, *Loyalties*, pp. 162–163; *idem*, *Mesopotamia, 1917–1920* (London, 1931), p. 32; M. Burr, "A Note on the Kurds," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 33 (1946), 289–292.

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Baratoff's Cossacks captured Rawanduz, not more than twenty percent of the Kurdish population survived to recall the day.

Russia Withdraws from the War

With Russian ascendancy the Nestorians seemed to have weathered the storm. In the spring of 1917 Shedd wrote that the native church problem was getting into better shape; the people felt that they had endured and that the Church had stability. What it needed was "the sense of a mission and a great work to do for God."[36] In the winter of 1917 Russian forces were reorganizing from their stable position and preparing for a resumption of operations in the spring. Their plans were ominous for the Turks early that year but were fated not to be. In March the Russian Revolution broke out. That summer the Kerensky government ordered Baratoff to withdraw all Russian forces from Persian soil. By the end of October there was military anarchy throughout the Caucasus army. In December Turkey and Bolshevik Russia entered into negotiations that resulted in the agreement of Brest-Litovsk; the agreement stipulated that "starting from the principle of the freedom, independence, and territorial inviolability of the neutral Persian Empire, the Turkish and Russian High Commands are both prepared to withdraw their troops from Persia."[37]

Germany and Turkey, however, refused to put this stipulation into effect because of the Allied operations against them in Mesopotamia and Persia and of the Allied support of the Armenians and Georgians in the Caucasus. A German staff officer is quoted by the *Times* historian to have written the Turkish commanders on the Persian front to "communicate discreetly to the Kurdish chiefs" that "according to Army orders received by me they are to accelerate the Russian withdrawal by continuing their robberies and ambushes, in spite of the Armistice . . . Explain to the tribes the precarious position of the Russians and tell them how easy success will be. Their withdrawal from Persia is imminent, and whilst it is in progress the greatest possible loss must be inflicted upon them."[38]

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[36] Letter to the Board, dated April 17, 1917.
[37] See Kazemzadeh, pp. 64, 84.
[38] *Times History*, xx, 84.

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With Russia out of the picture, the Turks were able to regain most of the lost territory in Anatolia despite Armenian efforts to hold the line all the way from the Black Sea to Persia. The pan-Turanian dreams of Enver were revived; he aimed at the annexation of both Caucasian and Persian Azerbayjan as well as Baku. The Turkish 15th Infantry Division, on its way back from the Rumanian front, was halted at the Bosporus and transported by sea to Batum. For the execution of his ambitious schemes, Enver chose his uncle Halil Pasha as commander of the "Army of Islam" on the Caucasus front, and his half-brother Nuri Pasha as officer in charge of the forces that entered Persian Azerbayjan in May 1918.[39]

Christian Population Isolated

With the disintegration of the Russian forces, the Nestorians had not only lost their chief military support but were now completely isolated. The question facing them was whether to escape to Russia while they still could or to hold on until the arrival of the British. In the meantime something had to be done to save life and property. The disappearance of the restraint which the Russian army had exercised was again followed by chaos. Russian soldiers themselves were responsible for much of the disorder that ensued. In the summer of 1917 Russian troops, angered by the inevitable depreciation of the ruble, which reduced the purchasing power of their pay to one-fourth of its former value, burned the bazaars of the town of Urmiyah, inflicting an incalculable loss on the already much-afflicted city. "The most troublesome source of trouble," wrote Shedd, "is the Russian army. They are a menace to the community."

Under these circumstances, the heads of the various missions, together with the leaders of the Christian community, tried to work out plans to secure order. Again the leader during these difficult days was Shedd. In January 1918 he was officially appointed Honorary United States Vice-Consul in Urmiyah, a post which he reluctantly accepted in the hope that official status might strengthen his position in his efforts to save the Christian community from utter destruction. As he explained it: "For me to refuse to advise with people or to help in the organization of some sort of police or gendarmerie

[39] Allen and Muratoff, p. 468; Montgomery, p. 133.

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force, when there are murders every day, and when the Government is helpless, and people are ready to fly at one another's throats, is simply impossible."[40]

The purely military task was undertaken by some two hundred White Russian officers and artillerymen who had stayed behind in Urmiyah. They tried to control and organize the remnants of former Nestorian irregulars whose numbers were swollen by Armenian refugees from Turkey. To help matters for them, the retreating Russian army had left behind large quantities of arms and ammunition, most of which the Christians inherited. Recognizing the fighting qualities of the mountain Nestorians and their knowledge of the fighting tactics of the enemy, the Allied conference in Tiflis also sent officers, including English and French, to instruct and advise the Christiantroops.[41] Referring to Captain Gracey, a Staff Intelligence Officer attached to the British Military Mission in the Caucasus, Mrs. Shedd wrote: "A British Military officer came to Urmiyah with promises of war materials, funds, and British officers and the Armenians and Syrians [Nestorians] were persuaded to throw in their lot with the Allies and hold that front for them."[42]

The efforts to organize and arm the Christian population naturally aroused strong resentment among the Muslims of Azerbayjan. They particularly resented the Hakkari Nestorians who made up the bulk of the Nestorian forces. Revengeful because of the wrongs inflicted on them, the Hakkari tribes, as already noted, had overrun the plains of Salmas and Urmiyah, draining off the scarce food supplies that might have proven sufficient for the native population. In vain did the weak Persians ask the Nestorian forces to turn in their arms. Their already weak position threatened, the Muslim population plotted and suddenly executed an attack on the Christian quarter of the town of Urmiyah (February 22, 1918). As a result of the fighting that ensued, the actual authority of the town passed into the hands of the Christian Council (*motwa*) even though the recognized governing body was meant to be a "Mixed Council" composed of an equal number of Christians and Muslims headed by a Muslim governor.

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[40] M.E. Shedd, pp. 229–230.

[41] U.S. Archives, Decimal File 891/1399, December 8, 1926; M.E. Shedd, p. 222.

[42] Captain Gracey's major mission in Urmiyan that winter was to win the Kurds over to the Allied side. See Wigram, *Our Smallest Ally*, pp. 35–36.

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Three weeks had hardly passed under the new regime when the Nestorian patriarch, Mar (Binyamin) Shamun XIX, and forty-five of his escorts were assassinated by Simko. The Governor of Tabriz had given Simko orders to do away with Mar Shamun. To accomplish his mission Simko had invited the Patriarch for a friendly conference. He received him cordially, and kissed him when leaving; then the patriarch and his men were pierced with bullets, a custom not uncommon in the treacherous annals of the East. The Hakkari Christians took their revenge on the Muslim population of Dilman and most of the villages of Salmas. Simko and his men had escaped to Khoi where they took part in the massacre of the Christians there. Christian brigands terrorized Christians as well as Muslims, but especially the latter. A missionary described this period as a reign of terror for Muslims hard to imagine. Men of good will on both sides tried earnestly and constantly to check lawlessness—made unbearable by famine conditions—but to very little purpose.

On the heels of the assassination of the patriarch came the fall of Van. In a few days the plain of Salmas had some 20,000 destitute Armenian refugees. Looting and disorder increased, the plight of the Muslim population becoming dire. The Christian forces were themselves becoming desperate; the help promised them never came and they were fast running out of ammunition. To make matters worse, the Armenian refugees from Van were pursued by superior Turkish forces under Nuri Pasha who, as noted above, was on his way to the Caucasus.

The British in Urmiyah

About three months before Nuri's forces entered Persia, a British mission under Major General Dunsterville, the expedition known as Dunsterforce, was in Persia, with the Caucasus as its objective.[43] The British had come to raise and organize local forces of Armenians and Georgians and through them to engage the Turkish troops who would otherwise be available for use against the British forces in Palestine, Mesopotamia, and Persia. As late as October 1917 Russian

[43] While in India Dunsterville became Rudyard Kipling's well-known character "Stalky." See C.E. Carrington, *The Life of Rudyard Kipling* (New York, 1955), pp. 23–24, 28–30.

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troops were still responsible for security between Kermanshah and the Caspian, but now the British were forced to act alone. Some of the members of the Eastern Committee of the War Cabinet, and the government of India, had come to the conclusion that a Turko-German drive through Persia and Afghanistan against India was imminent and were prepared to support any scheme to check it. Moreover, it was important to prevent the oil fields of Baku from falling into the hands of the Central Powers. The task facing Dunsterville was thought to be an easy one despite the vigorous objections of General Marshall of Mesopotamia. In the words of the British Chief of the Imperial General staff, Sir William Robertson: "What was needed [in Persia and Trans-Caspia] was to dispatch to the centres of intrigue and disaffection a few Englishmen of the right type to give our version of the state of affairs, furnish them with money to pay handsomely for intelligence and other services rendered, and provide them with just sufficient escort to ensure their personal safety."[44]

The path of Dunsterville was beset by difficulties from the very beginning. His route to the Caspian was blocked on the Manjil Pass by Kuchuk Khan and his Jungalis who were supplied with German equipment and commanded by a German major. The Persian officials, especially the "Democrats," were hostile, blaming the British for the Russian penetration of Persia. The difficulties of the British expedition were further increased by winter weather; famine conditions prevailed all along the way through Persia. Despite these obstacles Dunsterville was able to reach Enzeli on the southern shores of the Caspian in February 1918, thanks to the demobilized Russian troops who gave him cover.

Dunsterville now began to prepare for the occupation of northern Persia by British troops. He was able to win over to his 200 British officers and N.C.O.'s some 1,200 seasoned Cossacks of the anti-Bolshevik Bicherakoff's detachment of *partisaniski* which the previous year had advanced toward Iraq. In early May, Dunsterville wrote his headquarters that with the aid of the Nestorians and other tribes, he might thwart Turkish advances toward Tabriz. To organize this resistance and to support his flank, the general sent a few officers and N.C.O.'s to Bijar and Miyaneh where they were to organize Persian and Kurdish irregulars and then advance toward

[44] Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, p. 27.

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Urmiyah.[45] In the meantime he had contacted the Nestorians with the idea of getting them to join forces with him.

In their race toward Tabriz, the British parties were outstripped by Nuri's forces, which had occupied the city in July (1918). A belated attempt was made to get in touch with the Nestorians who, sorely pressed now, had appealed for immediate help. Dunsterville, his force swelled in June by new arrivals, was ready to help. On July 8, 1918 he sent a message to the Nestorians by plane and a plan was concerted to have the Nestorian-Armenian forces meet a British convoy at Sayyin Qalah two weeks later. Through this little front at Urmiyah—considered "the most interesting of all, and promises most"—Dunsterforce might even join the Armenians farther north, thus "threatening the whole of Turkish movement in the Caucasus."[46]

Nestorians Flee Urmiyah

A British convoy carrying arms and ammunition was dispatched as planned under the escort of the 14th Hussars. The British reached the appointed place on time but, not finding their "allies" there, retired to Bijar. The Nestorians, delayed by preparations and fighting on the way, followed the British and received the long-awaited help. But the delay had already given rise to wild rumors in Urmiyah that Agha Patrus, who commanded the expedition, and his men were all slaughtered. The small force that remained in Urmiyah could not hold back the enemy. Thus the entire Christian population, with their cattle and belongings poured southward in appalling confusion to join the British, with the Turks and Kurds on their heels.

The story of how thousands of these refugees suffered and died; how they were reluctantly received but humanely treated and brought to Iraq by the British has often been related. One reason why they were transported to Iraq was the famine conditions in Persia, where thousands of Persians and Kurds starved. That is the ugly story of war when man's natural enemies, cold, hunger, disease and fear combine with religious hatred and blind passion to overwhelm the dictates of humanity and conscience.

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[45] L.C. Dunsterville, *The Adventures of Dunsterforce* (London, 1932), p. 125; M.H. Donohue, *With the Persian Expedition* (London, 1919), pp. 133–165.

[46] Dunsterville, pp. 188–189.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

IN EXILE

Minority Problems

The protection of minorities at the end of the First World War was one of the most difficult problems raised by the political disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. The nationalities and sects of the empire were many and intimately intermingled; they could not be all sorted out into homogeneous or territorially segregated units in accordance with the new principles of freedom. The essence of the administrative system of the empire had been horizontal; the millet system had laid no emphasis on geographical boundaries or linguistic unity, two factors most emphasized in the mapping of the new frontiers after the war.

The clash between the new and the old way of life became inevitable; the two concepts on the status of minorities were incompatible. The old millet organization encouraged autonomy but generally left the members of a minority in a position of inequality with the ruling nationality. The Western concept of equality of all citizens, a principle which became especially popular after the war, became the basis of all the minority provisions in the major treaties of peace and their subsidiary instruments. But whenever these guarantees were to apply to the Near Eastern countries and populations, arrangements were freely adopted from the traditional millet system. The result was a syncretism which was wholly inadequate and is best illustrated by Part IV of the abortive Treaty of Sèvres.[1]

The treaty provided (Article 145) that all Turkish nationals should be equal before the law and should enjoy the same civil and political rights without distinctions as to race, language, or religion; that differences of religion, creed, or confession should not prejudice any Turkish national in matters relating to the enjoyment of civil or political rights. Yet Article 149 of the same treaty called for the Turkish

[1] For the full text of this treaty, see League of Nations, *Treaty Series*, no. 11 (1920); *Parliamentary Papers*, Cmd. 964 (1920).

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government to confirm and uphold "in their entirety the prerogatives and immunities of an ecclesiastical, scholastic or judicial nature granted by the Sultans to non-Moslem races" through special orders, imperial decrees or by ministerial orders of the Grand Vizier. All laws, decrees, regulations and circulars issued by the Turkish Government that restrict these prerogative and immunities "shall be considered to such extent null and void."

This combination of the old and new laws and regulations was a weakness as well as a contradiction. The treaty aimed at creating a sense of common nationhood and collective responsibility at the same time that it advocated the millet system in its "entirety," making a person's membership in his particular religious community, and not his citizenship, the most important fact about him. The millet system had been part and parcel of the old Near Eastern conception of society which the introduction of Western nationalism and concepts of democracy had overthrown. The old "millet" concept, with its defects and strength had grown up as a unity. It was impracticable to preserve most of it now without also retaining the mentality which had gone into its making. The new nationalism tended to encourage a love of uniformity and a new suspicion of diversity, concepts that strained relations between the majority and the minorities. The nationalist tendency to assimilate and unify was directed also to the taming of the remote highlands or desert tribes that had hitherto challenged the authority of the central government. The new nation-states now tried to crush with their superior forces not only the Armenians and Greeks but also the Kurds, Yazidis, Turkmen, as well as the bedouin tribes who in the opinion of the central government interfered with the smooth running of the central administration.

An important factor that prevented the solution of the minority problem in an atmosphere of moderation was the fact that the new countries were being formed at a time when the idea of nationalism and self-determination had been broadcast throughout the world and had been thrust home in the Near East by explicit pledges given to its several minorities. The knowledge of the Fourteen Points of Woodrow Wilson with his principle of self-determination was widespread as early as 1919 even among such diverse groups as the bedouins of southern Iraq, the mountaineers of Daghistan, the nomads of Kurdistan, as well as the Turkish nationalists of Sivas

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and Erzerum.[2] The Anglo-French declaration of 1918, which promised the establishment of indigenous governments and administrations, was given wide publicity among the Arabs and at the same time it "encouraged aspirations amongst the Armenians and Assyrians, Chaldeans and Syrian Christians,"[3] as well as the Kurds.

The first treaty of peace with Turkey provided (Article 88) that "in accordance with the action already taken by the Allied Powers," Turkey had to recognize Armenia "as a free and independent State."[4] Article 62 proposed the drafting of a "scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas." An "independent Kurdish State" was envisioned by Article 64: ". . . if within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council then considers that these peoples are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them."

Within this scheme, which provided for the recognition and respect of the millet system when the minorities were not large enough to be declared potentially sovereign and independent, Article 62 on Kurdistan called for "full safeguards for the protection of the Assyro-Chaldeans and other racial or religious minorities within these areas." In Syria the French not only stimulated the development of an anti-Syrian national consciousness among the Lebanese Christians and the Alawis, but enrolled the Christians as volunteers during the Syrian war of independence and enlisted Armenians and Circassians as mercenary troops. In Iraq, as we shall see, it was the Assyrians and Kurds who were enlisted by Britain and alienated from the Arab majority.[5]

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[2] James G. Harbord, "American Military Mission to Armenia, October 16, 1919," reproduced in full in *American Association for International Conciliation*, no. 151 (June 1920), 284.

[3] Wilson, *Mesopotamia* p. 103.

[4] It is important to bear in mind that until the summer of 1923 the Treaty of Sèvres was theoretically in force and that until then the policies of Great Britain and Iraq were influenced by the possible implementation of a number of the articles of the treaty.

[5] See A.J. Toynbee, *The Islamic World Since the Peace Settlement*, Vol. 1 in *Survey of International Affairs*, 1925 (London, 1927), pp. 17–19, 71–72, 435–437, 482–490,

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The Nestorian Problem

The problem of the settlement of the Nestorian minority presented itself soon after the war was over. It is difficult to speak with confidence of a national sentiment among these Christians, a people who had never constituted a single and comprehensive state. Their history was unlike that of the European Christians of Turkey, who for centuries had nourished a common stock of traditions and aspiration that were identified with particular territories, furnishing the minorities with a psychological basis for a centralized political entity. The Nestorians, like the rest of the Eastern Christians, with the possible exception of the Maronites and the Armenians, had no local nucleus or a definite area of homeland. Nevertheless, there was among them a strong feeling of national fellowship. Although the autonomy enjoyed under the millet system had gradually become reduced to questions affecting principally the personal status of members of the various communities, the tendency of these communities to maintain a national solidarity and political exclusiveness had been marked.[6] Among these "Suraye" of Turkey especially, the ecclesiastical leadership of the people had gained political experience very early. There was also an increasing measure of confidence and allegiance to the church hierarchy on the part of the people; with them the millet really replaced the state as the focal center of everyday life.

We have already noticed the national self-consciousness that the Nestorians gradually developed as a result of the missionary focus on them and the interference of the Western powers in their behalf.[7] During World War I and the years immediately following it, they were attracted by the notions of national self-determination discussed above; like other minorities of the Ottoman Empire, they were allured by the ideas of autonomy and national unity. In the Arab world, from Morocco to Iraq, nationalists-turned-historians were rediscovering their ancient ancestors and resurrecting the heroes of a distant past, elevating them into symbols of the fatherland. In the case of the Nestorians, the remains of the ancient Assyrians were literally

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538–543; H.W.V. Temperley, ed., *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris*, vi (London, 1924), 50–51, 99–104; Helen C.M. Davis, *Some Aspects of Religious Liberty of Nationals in the Near East* (New York, 1938), p. 16; A.H. Hourani, *Minorities in the Arab World* (London, 1947), p. 114.

[6] Young, II, 2; Steen de Jehay, p. 12.

[7] See above, pp. 115f.

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dug out of the ground, exhibited to the dazzling eyes of the world, and the Christian's surrounding the excavation sites were proclaimed to be the only human remains of those ancients. These Christians nascent nationalistic feelings were intensified by their latent sense of insecurity; a people traumatized by the terrible times they had just passed through, were susceptible to movements that promised cohesion and backing. Romanticism and the appeal to past glory filled the gaping void in their national life.[8] During the First World War, as the "smallest ally" of Great Britain, they were encouraged to make nationalistic demands. The elation of their nationalists is well illustrated by the following verse of a poem composed in 1915:

> Forth we go to battle, raging o'er the mountains
> Hearts all yearning forth to Mosul's fertile plain.
> Nineveh's fair city summons back her children
> Forth we go to battle in thy name O Mar Shimon.[9]

Arnold J. Toynbee aptly referred to the nationalism of such small minorities as "a will-o'-the-wisp enticing them to destruction."[10]

While it is difficult to ascertain whether these members of the Church of the East had the desire to coalesce into a national state, it is certain that through the centuries they had developed an intense devotion to their old homegrounds in both Hakkari and Urmiyah. A deputation of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions found the Christians of Persia with an intense longing to return to their ancestral homes, "as those Jewish exiles of old in the land of their exile longed for hills and valleys' of Palestine."[11] This longing for their native land in Persia was well expressed by the representatives of the community itself in a petition addressed to the deputation of the Presbyterian Board: "The greatest part of our men and women are real lovers of their tongue and nation, and are ready to put down their lives in its behalf... we believe that the existence of this ancient nation and tongue depends on the opening of our beloved native place, which we hope will be the nucleus to gather all our people around it in the future..." Realizing that their last hope to achieve their goal lay in the efforts of the Persian government to

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[8] See above, pp. 19–20.

[9] Translated by Wigram in *Our Smallest Ally*, p. 16; See also Ya'qūb Iskhaq. *Sha'ri 'al Plāsha d'Suryāyi* (New York, 1920).

[10] A.J. Toynbee, *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey* (Boston, 1922), p. 127.

[11] Speer and Carter, p. 330.

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open Urmiyah for them, the representatives asked the Board to exert its influence "to secure the opening of our land, and the altars of our [nationality]." They seem to have been unwilling to identify their future with that of their brethren from Turkey. They wanted nothing more than regaining the cultural autonomy and economic prosperity which were their lot during the years preceding the war. "Strange is their love of home and their willingness to start over again if they can only be promised protection."[12]

The Nestorians of Turkey likewise wanted to return to their ancestral villages in Kurdistan but on the condition that their security be guaranteed by the British. The wishes of this group were addressed early in 1919 by the Patriarch himself. In his letter to the Acting Civil Commissioner, Mar Shamun requested that all his people be placed "permanently under the British protection in their own country. He asked that the districts of Urmiyah, Sulduz, and Salmas on the western side of Lake Urmiyah be placed in this protectorate, if possible. If such a protectorate were proclaimed, "the safety of our people is assured and we have not the least wish to interfere with the right of the Kurdish inhabitants of the land." He also requested the British government to recognize the position of the patriarch as the head of the millet: "Owing to the primitive state of our people," he explained, "we beg that the whole patriarchal form of government over their various tribes be continued under the British superintendence and advice. This simple government is what the people are accustomed to, and it has been found to work best in the past."[13]

To be sure, the Nestorians were not without their super patriots with irrational projects and extravagant claims. Like a host of other minorities after World War I, they too had self-appointed representatives who were ready to put the claims of their people before the Peace Conference in Paris. A delegation made up of the president and other members of the "Assyrian National Associations of America" had an elaborate draft of "claims of the Assyrians" which it placed before the Conference in Paris. By "Assyrian" these diaspora nationalists meant not only the Nestorians, Chaldeans, and Jacobites, but

[12] *Annual Report* of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, 1922, pp. 51–52. For details on the Nestorians of Iran and their return to their native Urmiyah, see below, pp. 207ff.

[13] For the full text of the letter see R.S. Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians* (London, 1935), pp. 75–77.

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also the Maronites as well as some "Islamic Assyrians" such as certain Kurdish tribes and the Yazidis of Jabal Sinjar.[14] Totally out of touch with the true state of affairs that surrounded their people, their claims included the northern part of Mesopotamia and altogether comprised "an area which stretches from below the lower-Zaba, up to and including, the province of Dearbeker (Diyarbakr), where the Assyrians vastly outnumbered the Armenians; and also from Euphrates in the west to the mountains of Armenia in the east. Moreover, the Assyrians "naturally desired an access to the sea." The delegation asked that the area claimed, "even though including some Kurds within its bounds," be created into "an Assyrian state, under the protectorate of some mandatory power," in order that the Assyrians people might be freed "from the repetition of the former barbarities to which they have been subjected for centuries by the combined hatred of the Turk and the Kurd." While acknowledging the fact that the Kurds were "qualified to the benefits of the principle of self-determination," the American-Assyrian deputation thought that the Kurdish claims should not be permitted "to expand and infringe upon the exclusive right of the Assyrians."[15]

The delegation in Paris was joined also by the future patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church (Jacobite), Ignatius Afram I Barsoum, then bishop of Syria. He was soon disillusioned by what he saw and heard there. At one of the sessions of the peace conference he found himself defending Arab rights instead of championing the cause of the "Assyrians." He was cheered hyperbolically by the Arab delegates present; they called him Bishop of Arabism—*Mutran al-ʿUruba* —and priest of all time—*Qass al-Zaman.*[16]

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[14] For a discussion of diaspora nationalism, see Ernest. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1983), pp. 101 seq.

[15] J.E. Warda, *The Flickering Light of Asia* (n.p., 1924), p. 205. See also *The Times*, April 20, 1920; *Correspondance d'Orient*, 15 (August 15–30, 1922), 455; *Oriente Moderno*, 2 (1922–1923), 578–581, 666–669.

[16] Ghrīghūrīyus Būlus Bahnām, *Nafaḥāt al-Khizām Aw Ḥāyat al-Baṭrak Afrām* (Mosul: 1959), pp. 25–27, 193–194. See also Matti I. Moosa, "Kitāb al-Luʾluʾ al-Manthūr, by Ignatius Aphram Barsoum, Syrian Patriarch of Antioch and all the East" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1954), p. vii. For a photograph of the delegation that attended the Peace Conference see *Assyrian Star* (Chicago), May–June, 1971, p. 8. For Jacobite petitions to the peace conference, see F.O. 608, no. 85, files 3472 and 3481 (1919). Cf. Ibn al-ʿIbri, "al-Ṭāʾifah al-Suryānīyah," p. 71, emphasizing that the leaders of the Jacobite Community were convinced that only their own government could restore their denied rights; those who had immigrated to America, he adds, thought differently.

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The Nestorian patriarch's own claims were not too ambitious nor were they directed toward the resurrection of ancient "Nineveh." He spoke only of his flock. In the summer of 1919, when he too was trying to send a representative to the Peace Conference,[17] he asked that:

1. Future security be secured under the protection of the British Government as a united nation in the area Mosul-Jezirah-Bashqala-Urmiyah.
2. The Persian Government should be required to guarantee the security of Assyrians who were formerly Persian subjects, and to insure their resettlement in the districts around Urmiyah. For this purpose a British consul and the maintenance of a special gendarmerie, commanded by British officers, were desired at Urmiyah.
3. The Persian Government be called upon to effect the release of all Christians at present held captive by Persians and Kurds in Persia.
4. Restitution be made of private and ecclesiastical lands and buildings, forcibly taken form the Assyrians by the Turks and Kurds (particularly the latter) during the past fifty years.
5. The ecclesiastical laws of the nation be recognized by the protecting nation.
6. The former grazing grounds, from which the mountain Assyrians had been driven by Moslem oppression, should again be made available for their flocks and herds.
7. Punishment be meted to certain Kurds and Persian chieftains who had systematically during the past few years oppressed and ill-treated Christians, and assurance given that this tyranny shall cease.[18]

Repatration

The problem of restoring the Nestorians to their country of origin (Hakkari) was a thorny one, difficult in the extreme to solve. The

[17] In September 1919, the able sister of the patriarch, Surma Khanum, was allowed by the India Office to depart for London where "on arrival the question of a visit to Paris could be considered." She met the most prominent figures of the time in London but was not able to go to Versailles.

[18] Stafford, p. 78.

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British government felt responsible and attempted to solve it. As the Acting Civil Commissioners Arnold Wilson explained it, the problem "need never have arisen had the British not attempted to make a cat's paw of the Christian communities in Persia and Caucasus."[19] Moreover, these Christians "had been recognized as allies by Great Britain in the war and had been used by her in the campaign of 1919 in Kurdistan.[20] A definite promise of settlement under a benevolent, if not British government, had been made to them . . ."[21]

Instead of repatriation the British authorities at one time decided to consult the Nestorians regarding the desirability of settling them in Canada.[22] This suggestion was put before them in the spring of 1919. Their decision was that going back to their ancient homes in Turkey and Iran was their first choice if their security were guaranteed. Only after all possibility of taking them back to their own land had been tried and failed would they consider leaving or migrating.

The first serious alternate scheme for settlement was one that proposed the establishment of the millet in an enclave in the district of Amadiyah within the British sphere of influence. The idea was that the Kurds in the area, who had twice revolted and recently had murdered the local British political officers, should be evicted and their lands given to the Assyrians.[23] It was hoped that once settled there the community would be self-supporting because the valley in question was fertile and sheltered. Moreover, the millet would be capable of protecting not only itself but also the fertile crescent to the south of it. The civil commissioner approved the scheme and in August 1919 wrote the Secretary of State for Colonies that the project afforded the British "an opportunity of doing justice to the Assyrian community in a manner acceptable alike to themselves and to European ideas of right and justice." According to the British administrator the scheme would not only enable the prospective

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[19] Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, p. 38.

[20] For a discussion of Assyrian relations with the British Government during the war, see above, pp. 147f.

[21] Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Report on Iraq Administration, 1920–22*, p. 102, hereafter cited as *Iraq Report; Parliamentary Papers*, Cmd. 1061 (1920), p. 71. Cf. Stafford, pp. 97–98; Longrigg, *Iraq 1900–1950*, p. 58.

[22] H.H. Austin, *The Baqubah Refugee Camp* (London, 1920), p. 108.

[23] *Parliamentary Papers*, Cmd. 1061 (1920), 71–72; Longrigg, *Iraq 1900–1950*, pp. 102–103.

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mandatory for Mesopotamia to solve one of the most difficult questions of religious and racial incompatibility in Kurdistan and to dispose of a grave menace to the future peace of northern Mesopotamia but it would also make possible the punishment of those responsible for the outrages of Amadiyah. The scheme was reported to have been welcome "to at least a great part of the people"[24] and was received with approval by the British government. The entire plan, however, was abandoned in May 1920 "owing to our military preoccupations elsewhere."

With the passage of time the problem became even more difficult to resolve. At the beginning of 1920 events in Syria and Iraq were rapidly approaching a crisis. The sources of general unrest were varied and many; the fact that a peace treaty with Turkey had yet to be concluded added to the uncertainties. Moreover, the repatriation of the Assyrian refugees itself was a problem fraught with danger. The people themselves were disunited: the mountaineers of Hakkari were against the plainsmen of Urmiyah, the Protestants against the "Nestorians," and a pro-patriarch faction opposed to its rival party. The community as a whole lacked leadership during these difficult years in exile. The millet was headed by a man who, ravaged by tuberculosis, lacked the capacity to exercise leadership. He had succeeded his patriarch brother in 1918 when the latter was murdered by Simko, the Shakak chief who for about four years after the war was the sole leader in the area west of Lake Urmiyah. The invalid patriarch, Mar (Pulus) Shamun XX, died after being in office for two years; he was followed by his nephew,[25] a boy eleven years of age. The wanderings of the people and their uncertain position had greatly damaged patriarchal influence and prestige. The only well-known personality from the house of Mar Shamun was a woman, Surma Khanum, a sister of the previous patriarch and aunt of the present one. She, however, had left Iraq in the autumn of 1919 for London; her prolonged absence served only to augment dissension.

In Iran the government had temporarily resisted the return of its former Christian subjects; it exerted little influence in the Urmiyah region where anti-Christian bitterness would long be remembered. The only practical authority there, as noted above, was that of Simko.

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[24] *Iraq Report, 1920–11*, p. 102.

[25] For a detailed discussion of relations between the young patriarch and the government of Iraq, see below, pp. 189–199.

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After the Christians were driven out, the Sunni Kurds had turned upon the Shiah Persians and driven out their leading families from the province.[26]

The situation in Hakkari was even more hazardous. Under different circumstances the Kurdish aghas might not have been unwilling to see their old "neighbor foes" back on their old land. But now Kurdistan was astir as never before. "Owing to the presence of large Christian communities in the towns as well as numerous Christian villages on and across the Kurdish border, Turkish influence was still strong and the Armenian question still acute."[27] A propaganda barrage from Turkey created the fear of Christian domination and vengeance backed by the Allies. "Before long," ran one leaflet, "your ears will be deafened by the sound of the bell—the voice of the muezzin will no longer be heard. Christian officials will treat you as the Russians, and you will have to kiss the feet of the Arabs and Chaldeans."[28]

Under these circumstances the civil administration in Baghdad looked with favor on a plan, suggested by the British director of repatriation, that claimed to dispose of the weary and expensive problem of the Assyrians.[29] The plan called upon the mountaineers and the plainsmen to unite and regain part of their former territory and form a combined "Assyrian nation" from the refugees at Baqubah who would then be joined by the large numbers who were still in the Caucasus, near Tabriz and in America. The scheme ventured upon the occupation of an area in the lower hill districts on the Turko-Persian border, east of a line drawn from Gawar to Ushnuwiyeh and extended from there toward Urmiyah. It was realized that it would be impossible for all the mountaineers to return to their homes but hopefully it would be possible to regain the mountain country eastward, where they would be in close touch with the Assyrians of Urmiyah. After their arrival in these localities it was hoped that they

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[26] Speer and Carter, pp. 353–354. For Simko's revolt see Toynbee, *Survey 1925*, pp. 538–539; *Oriente Moderno* 1 (1921–22), 548, 615, 754; 2 (1922–23), 115, 243–244, 425; A. Gudhart, "The Blood of Martyrs," *Atlantic Monthly*, 130 (1922), 115–121.

[27] Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, p. 131.

[28] Cf. *Documents on British Policy, 1919–1939, IV*, 679 (no. 451); see also Longrigg, *Iraq 1900–1950*, p. 101; *Parliamentary Papers*, Cmd. 1061 (1920), p. 62; Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, p. 131.

[29] Lt. Col. F. Cunliffe-Owen, "The Assyrians of Iraq," *The National Review*, 101 (1933), 463; cf. *idem*. "The Assyrian Adventure of 1920," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 9 (1922), 89.

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could even claim to return to their own homes without fighting. The Urmiyans were mostly uninterested in these ventures. They only wanted the Persian government to permit their return to their former properties peaceably; they would hand in all arms if the other inhabitants did likewise.

When the plan was fully considered by the British authorities, Agha Patrus, who had played an important role as commander of the Assyrian troops during the war, was chosen for its execution. Following the war the commander had fallen out of favor with the British authorities because of his claim to head the Assyrian fighting force with its British officers serving under him, and because of his intrigues against the patriarchal family. But now he was the only national leader interested in the affairs of his people, and a large number of them backed him. There were also some British officers who had come to believe in him and all in authority were anxious to resolve the problem. And there were those who wanted to exploit the refugee manpower. "Having regard alone to British interests," wrote the British director of repatriation after the event, "the establishment of a strong and united element on the borders of our occupied territory must have been a safeguard to us. [Assyrian] interests are our interests," he added, oblivious to the true interest or predicament of the Assyrians.[30]

It is important to remember that the Treaty of Sèvres was signed only two months before the proposed expedition started. The treaty had envisioned, as noted above, an "independent Kurdish State" in which the rights of the "Assyro-Chaldeans" were to be fully safeguarded. Lord Curzon, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs who had negotiated the treaty, had hoped that the Assyrians would be moved to their own homes, where if armed "as a sort of gendarmerie to themselves," they would get along well with their Kurdish neighbors.[31]

It was finally determined that the two Assyrian battalions which served British interests in Iraq, should be disbanded and placed under the command of Agha Patrus, with rifles and ammunition equivalent to the amount the Assyrians possessed before they were dis-

[30] F. Cunliffe-Owen, "The Assyrian Adventure," p. 93; Cf. Wigram, *Assyrians*, p. 221.

[31] *Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 38* (December 17, 1919), 291.

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armed at the end of the World War.[32] It was also decided to provide the people with certain material and transport, placed under the supervision of British officers, who would observe and report to the director of the repatriation on to the progress of the venture. The scheme, first proposed in March 1920, was set into operation at the end of April. By October 19, 1920, about 6,000 armed men, grouped according to their tribes, were assembled, with their animal transport and reserve food in a forward camp. In cooperation and agreement with the local Kurdish chiefs, the group moved on to Aqrah-Dagh, the limits of the occupied territory, and there the expedition was left entirely in the hands of the native "general." Agha Patrus and his men were to occupy the territory and their families were to follow later.

The enterprise upon which so much care and organization had been expended came to a failure a few days after it started. The country immediately across the Aqrah-Dagh, though nominally within the administrative sphere of the British, was actually occupied by Surchi and Zibari Kurds, both hostile to the British. Here the Assyrians were opposed by Faris Agha of Zibar and Shaykh Ahmad of Barzan;[33] they were both overcome. Faris Agha was driven off to the west, toward Nirwah and Rayqan, Kurdish districts that had always been loyal to the British. Agha Patrus had ordered a pursuit of the Zibaris instead of moving toward his goal and, according to the plan, negotiating as he went along. The best men of the fighting clans, Tiyari and Tkhuma found themselves moving in the direction of their own mountains, with arms enough to wreak full vengeance on ancient enemies. The armed mountaineers could not resist the attraction of the nearness of their old homes; they broke away in an attempt to reoccupy their ancestral villages. The Persian section, thus deserted, came to a halt in the unfamiliar hills and retreated in disorder to Aqrah and Mindan having lost about a hundred men from the cold of an early winter. Eventually the mountaineers too retreated to Mindan after their wild escapades.

Only two weeks from the time when the plan was set into motion, all were back in the refugee camp, only now the problem was sadly

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[32] For a discussion of British use of Assyrian forces against Turks and Kurds, see below, pp. 164–166.

[33] For the state of relations between the British and these two Kurdish chieftains see W.R. Hay, *Two Years in Kurdistan, 1918–1920* (London, 1921), pp. 180–181; Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, pp. 151–153.

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more complicated by the scheme on which such high hopes had been built. Agha Patrus was reported as greatly demoralized, having lost a good deal of his arrogance. When he found that no one of the British authorities would have any further dealing with him, he exhorted his followers not to fall in with any British scheme as he was about to conclude with the French an arrangement for an autonomous Assyria under French protection. High Commissioner Sir Percy Cox wrote that the presence of Agha Patrus had proved throughout an impediment to any practical scheme; "matters were facilitated by his departure in August [1921], at my request, for Europe."[34] He died in France soon after his exile.

The British government then encouraged the refugees to return to their old homes according to a scheme of "repatriation by infiltration" that was approved by the occupation authorities in the spring of 1921. Even before this official "dispersal scheme" was set into motion, a few hundred Nestorians of Barwar-i Bala, which later was to be part of Iraq, had returned home by friendly arrangements with the local Kurdish chief and had occupied their own homes "kept in good repair by the Kurds."[35] Many of the mountaineers found their way back to their villages in the Hakkari country where, according to the Treaty of Sèvres, Turkish authority would not be a problem. Others whose homes would be in territory that was definitely recognized as Turkish, were settled under British auspices in villages on the plain of the Mosul vilayet.

From Refugees to Mercenaries

The British mandatory government in Iraq began to exploit the Assyrians by enlisting their able-bodied men into the Iraq "Levies." Their enlistment, said the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Winston Churchill, was something which "I have been endeavoring to form out of the refugees who have so long enjoyed our reluctant hospitality."[36] Until 1921 the Iraq Levies had consisted entirely of Arabs, Kurds, and Turkomans; but now that the Iraqi army was to be

[34] *Iraq Report, 1920–22*, pp. 103–105; Wigram, *Assyrians*, pp. 225–228; F. Cunliffe-Owen, "The Assyrian Adventure," pp. 88–91; B. Cunliffe-Owen, *Thro' the Gates of Memory* (London, 1921), pp. 169–170, 221–228, 238–240.

[35] *Iraq Report, 1920–22*, p. 108.

[36] *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, 143 (June 14, 1921), 279.

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formed, the Arabs would be required to join it, leaving the non-Arabs at the disposal of the mandatory authorities. Soon after the war was over about two thousand Nestorians had been enlisted as gendarmerie and organized into two battalions used for the protection of their own refugees and also for the defense of the Mosul frontier in the north.[37] These forces were "quite distinct" from the Iraq Levies, originally known as Shabanas. During the uprising of 1920 in Iraq, it was the Shabanas, mostly Arab, that had been used by the British against their compatriots. The Christian battalions were involved in the rebellion only when the Christian camps were attacked by the Arabs at Baqubah and by Surchi Kurds at Mindan.[38]

When both Great Britain and France found out that they could not count upon the consent of the majority of the governed in Iraq and Syria, or upon the willingness of their own soldiers and taxpayers to shoulder commitments made in those countries, they were strongly tempted to utilize any warlike local minority which happened to be loyal to the mandatory. As we have noted, in Syria the French enrolled Lebanese Christians as volunteers during the Syrian War of Independence and enlisted Armenians and Circassians as mercenaries; in Iraq it was largely the Kurds and the Assyrians who were so used. The Assyrians, like the Armenians in Syria, were put in an especially difficult position; they dared not offend the mandatory power on whose good will their maintenance largely depended; on the other hand, they did not want to antagonize the neighboring population. The British commanders of the Assyrian Levies have reported that "the greatest persuasion" had to be used to have the Assyrians enlist. They "saw that by joining the levy force it would make it impossible for them to live side by side with Kurds afterwards, and they did not want to join for that reason." Their recruitment was also forced by the famine conditions prevailing among them, "a form of economic conscription they found . . . impossible to resist."[39] In order to have a firmer grip upon the Levies, most of

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[37] Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, p. 37.

[38] *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, 134 (November 10, 1920), 1158–1159; A.L. Haldane, *The Insurrection in Mesopotamia, 1920* (London, 1922), p. 247; Stafford, p. 63; J.G. Browne, *The Iraq Levies* (London, 1932), pp. 4–10; Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, p. 291; cf. 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ḥasani, Ta'rīkh al-'Irāq al-Siyāsi al-Ḥadīth (Sidon, 1948), III, 294.

[39] See comments by C.R. Barke in J.G. Browne, "The Assyrians," *The Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 85 (January 1937), 182; J.G. Browne, *The Iraq Levies*, p. 15; *Oriente Moderno*, 21 (1941), 291; *Iraq Report 1925*, p. 33.

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the tribal leaders and their sons received commissions in the Levy force, the principal commission going to the father of the patriarch.[40] This greatly strengthened the waning influence of the patriarchal family and in a few years led, as we shall see, to the excessive claims of Mar Shamun in Iraq.

From Millets to Minorities

While the Nestorian problem seemed to be resolving itself more or less satisfactorily in 1921–1922, Turkish nationalists at Ankara defied their Sultan and his government at Istanbul and repudiated the humiliating Treaty of Sèvres that he had signed. The negotiations imposed by the Allies had perpetuated the rights of the European powers to interfere in the internal affairs of Turkey. The minorities of the empire (*millets*) were used as a pretext for intervention. Armenians, Kurds, Maronites, Jews, as well as the "Assyro-Chaldeans" were used at the end of the war, just as the Arabs were manipulated at its beginning. An independent Armenia, a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas—leading to independence if the Kurds so desired; a Jewish national home in Palestine, a Greater Lebanon dominated by the Maronites, special privileges for the Nestorians in northern Iraq, led to an inflation of nationalist hopes and demands that would for long strain minority-majority relations.

Under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, the Turkish nationalists were determined to save Turkey proper from dismemberment. Early in 1921 they adopted the National Pact for whose terms they continued to fight. Luckily for the Turks, their nationalist movement had coincided with the breakup of Tsarist Russia. The first article of the National Pact[41] defined the policy of the new nationalist movement regarding the province of Mosul and the Kurds without explicitly mentioning them. The Article declared that all Ottoman territories, "whether within or outside the . . . Armistice line, which are inhabited by a [non-Arab] Ottoman Moslem majority . . . form a whole which does not admit of division for any reason in truth or in ordinance."

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[40] *Iraq Report, 1922–23*, p. 52.

[41] For a complete text of this document see Temperley, VI, 605–606; Toynbee, *The Western Question*, pp. 209–210; *Current History*, 17 (1922) 280.

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This formula implied a claim to retain under Turkish sovereignty territories predominantly inhabited not only by Turks but also by Kurds; it laid a claim over at least the greater part of the predominantly Kurdish vilayet of Mosul. In 1921, the government of the Grand National Assembly at Ankara was already strong enough to begin to assert its authority over the Kurdish tribes immediately beyond the boundary of the Anglo-Iraqi administration.[42] It was not until the end of September 1921 that ascendancy over the Turks and Kurds was regained by the Iraq Levies, most of them Assyrians, with the cooperation of the Royal Air Force. Finally, on November 20, 1922 the Lausanne Conference opened with the determination of the frontier between Turkey and Iraq on its agenda.

The Lausanne Conference

At the Lausanne Conference the British made their last effort on behalf of the Nestorians with a view to settling them in their original homegrounds in Turkish Hakkari. At the meetings of the First Commission held on January 9, 1923 Lord Curzon spoke of the "Assyro-Chaldeans" as a small people, but with respect to race, history, religion and sufferings, one which excited greater interest in the world than any other community. He stated that part of these people were either "in Turkish territory or want to go back to the place in Turkish territory near Julamerk where they originally were."[43] He assured the Conference that the British government would do their best for those who were within the confines of the British influence; as regards those who "are already in Turkey, or propose to go back there," Lord Curzon hoped that the Turkish government would give full guarantees for their language, schools, customs, and religion. A few days earlier, the British member of a subcommission had made proposals that the Assyro-Chaldeans be "reassembled at

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[42] See *Iraq Report, 1920–22*, pp. 115–116.

[43] "Records of Proceedings of the Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern Affairs, 1922–23, and Draft Terms of Peace," *Parliamentary Papers*, 26 (1923), Cmd. 1814, 299–300. Stafford is in error when he writes that at the conferences preceding the signing of the Lausanne Treaty hardly any mention was made of the Assyrians, "Though Lord Curzon in one memorandum did state that it was impossible to expect the Assyrians to accept the return of the Turkish rule to Hakkari." See his *Tragedy*, p. 82.

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a fixed point in Turkish territory," there to preserve their customs and traditions "under the authority of Turkey."[44] The Turkish delegate had met this suggestion "with an absolute and clear refusal."

The Turkish nationalists, having vividly in mind the many past pretexts for intervention in Turkish affairs allegedly in behalf of non-Muslim minorities, and conscious of recent nationalist claims of the Greeks and Armenians, felt apprehensive lest provisions of this character should have the tendency, if not the purpose, to permit future political interventions by the European powers. It was, indeed, such an apprehension that had impelled the Turks to kill or expel almost the entire native Christian population of the country outside Istanbul.[45]

At the meeting of the First Commission at Lausanne, Ismet Pasha told Lord Curzon that the Allied proposals with regard to "national homes" for minorities such as the Assyro-Chaldeans and Armenians would involve the dismemberment of Turkey and, therefore, his delegation could not so much as embark on a discussion of special privileges of the kind proposed. The rights that had already been secured for all the non-Muslim minorities at the conference were quite adequate;[46] those measures said Ismet, would so completely efface all trace of the wounds and sorrows left by the war, that no obstacle would remain in the way of bringing about perfect understanding between all Turkish citizens.[47] Lord Curzon eventually had to concede that on certain aspects of the question of the minorities, the Powers gave way to the Turkish claims in their desire to secure an agreement.

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[44] *Parliamentary Papers* 26, (1923), Cmd. 1814, 308.

[45] Toynbee, *Islamic World*, pp. 517–518. For the fate of the Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) population that continued to live in their ancestral homegrounds, see my *Muslim-Christian Relations*, pp. 99 seq. See also Churches Committee on Migrant Workers in Europe, *Christian Minorities in Turkey* (1979), and *The Situation of Christian Minorities of Turkey Since the Coup d'Etat of September 1980* (1982).

[46] These rights—later incorporated in articles 37–45 of the Treaty of Lausanne—were of much the same character as those secured to the minorities of eastern Europe. In addition, proposals were added in the case of Turkey to the effect that non-Muslim minorities shall be permitted to regulate questions of family or personal status according to their usages. *Parliamentary Papers*, 26 (1923), Cmd. 1814, 295–296, 303–305.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 302. Cf. *Iraq Report, 1923–24*, pp. 33–34.

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Assyrians and Mosul

When the question of the boundary line between Iraq and Turkey was next discussed, Lord Curzon changed his position regarding the settlement of the Assyro-Chaldeans. He presented arguments contrary to what he had said two weeks earlier when the question of minorities was negotiated. Faced with the Turkish claim for the entire vilayet of Mosul, the British delegation used the Assyrians as one of the political reasons why the Turkish claim could not be agreed to. At the meeting of the Commission held on January 23, 1923 Curzon argued that the Kurdish,[48] the Arab, and the non-Muslim elements of the population of the Mosul vilayet did not desire to return to Turkey.

Referring to the Christian element, Curzon emphasized the Nestorian suffering and exile and said that they had settled in an alien country rather than submit to Turkish rule in their own land; they would fight to the death rather than permit the return of their new home to "a people who to them are the symbols of misrule and oppression." To prove his point, Lord Curzon states that the Nestorians settled in the northern parts of the vilayet were preparing themselves by raising levies and it was none other but "the Turks they were defending themselves against."[49] Only two weeks earlier Curzon had been pleading for a place of retreat and concentration[50] under Turkish rule for "the isolated communities" such as the Nestorians. Strangely, he was not reminded that only recently he had said that numbers of Nestorians were either "in Turkish territory or want to go back" to a place "in Turkish territory near Julamerk."

Failing to come to an agreement on the frontier question, it was finally decided to conclude the peace by excluding the Mosul question from the agenda of the Conference; instead, the question would be settled within nine months by common agreement between Great Britain and Turkey. In the event that no agreement could be reached

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[48] In December, 1922, the month preceding the Lausanne deliberations, the British and Iraqi governments published a joint declaration in which they recognized "the right of the Kurds living within the boundaries of Iraq to set up a Kurdish Government within these boundaries," and invited them to send responsible delegates to Baghdad for a conference, after arriving at an agreement among themselves. *Iraq Report, 1922–23*, p. 38.

[49] *Parliamentary Papers*, 26 (1923), Cmd. 1814, 358. For further discussion of Iraqi levies, see above, pp. 164–166.

[50] Harold Nicolson, *Curzon, The Last Phase, 1919–1925* (New York, 1939), p. 316.

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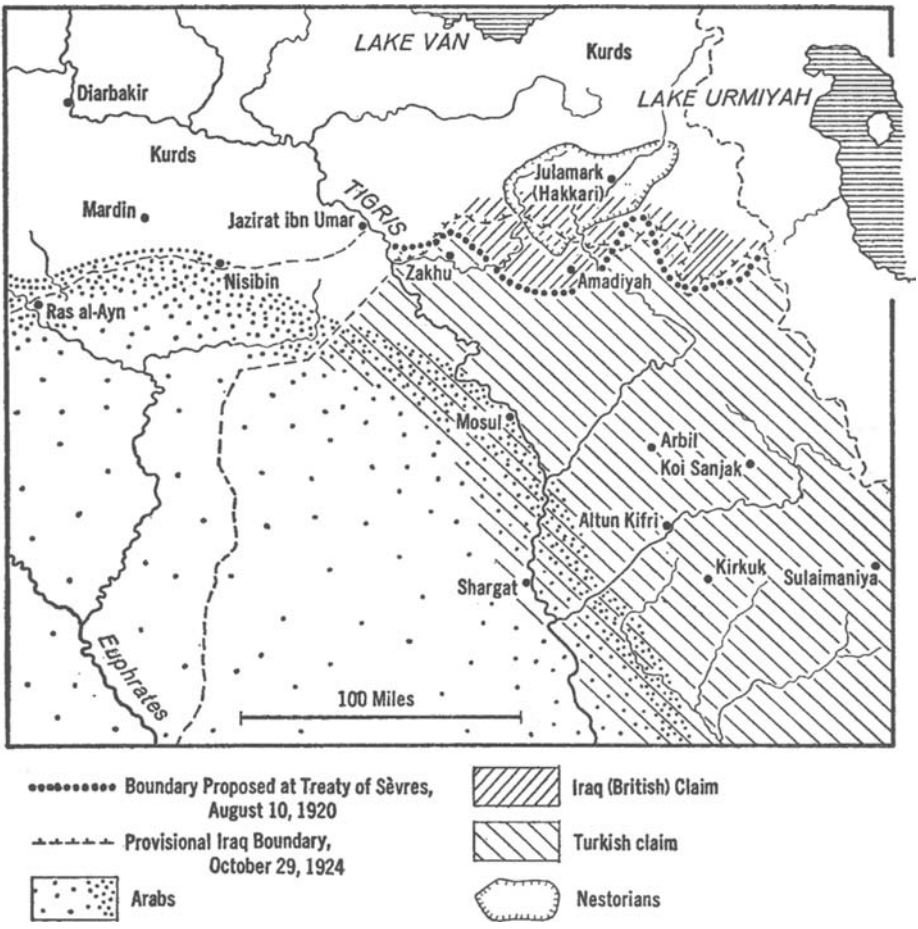

Turko-Iraqi Frontier, 1920–1925

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between the two governments, the dispute would be referred to the Council of the League of Nations. Pending a decision to be reached, it was agreed to observe the *status quo* in the disputed territory of Mosul.

The Constantinople Conference

The contemplated negotiations between Great Britain and Turkey took place at Constantinople on May 19, 1924; the Conference almost immediately arrived at an impasse. The Turkish delegate, Fethi Bey—then President of the Grand National Assembly—renewed his country's demand for the restoration of the province of Mosul. Sir Percy Cox, the former High Commissioner of Iraq, declined to discuss the Turkish demand and asked for a frontier that ran considerably to the north of the boundary of Mosul vilayet to include part of the prewar homegrounds of the Nestorians which Curzon at Lausanne had referred to as Turkish territory. Sir Percy explained the new British proposal by saying that since the negotiations at Lausanne were broken off, the problem of the future of the Assyrian refugees from Turkey had "gained considerably in importance in the eyes of His Majesty's Government." As a result of earnest appeals by the Assyrians for British protection, His Majesty's government had decided to endeavor to secure a frontier which, while fulfilling the recognized requirements of a good treaty frontier, would at the same time admit the establishment of the Assyrians in a compact community within the limits of the territory mandated to Great Britain by the League of Nations. Sir Percy said that he thought the Turkish government would be prepared to meet the wishes of the British government to annex "suitable adjacent districts" in Turkey which were formerly ancestral habitations of the Assyrians, because the region was inhospitable and its administration and control had in the past been a constant embarrassment to the Turkish government.[51]

A bewildered Fethi Bey reminded Cox that instead of resuming the negotiations at the point at which Lord Curzon left them at Lausanne, he was raising a new question—that of the future of the Assyrians. To secure the Assyrians' future, "you ask for the annex-

[51] League of Nations, Frontier Commission, *Question of the Frontier between Turkey and Iraq*, p. 79; henceforth referred to as Commission Report.

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ation . . . of certain territories which are now under the flag of the Turkish Republic. To say that this demand does not astonish me would be a perversion of the truth."

Faced with the serious claim of Turkey to regain the entire province of Mosul, the British administration in Baghdad seems to have thought of using the Nestorian problem to advantage. As we have seen, the mandatory power had already started to exploit these weary and demoralized refugees. These "sturdy mountaineers" were trained and armed under the command of British officers in order to release British and Indian troops then occupying Mosul and the northern frontier.[52] The Christian recruits were used in resisting Turkish attacks from the north and in taming the rebellious Kurds,[53] despite the fact that it was not to these refugees' vital interest to fight their Muslim neighbors.[54] After the failure of negotiations at Lausanne and prior to their resumption at Constantinople we find the British high commissioner's report speaking of the advantages of settling the Assyrians in northern Iraq.[55] These advantages were seen as mutual to both the Assyrians and the Iraqi state. The Assyrians, for their part, would share in the benefits of British advice and assistance offered by the present treaty or by any subsequent agreement between the two countries. Instead of Turkish rule, they would be placed in the hands of Arabs, who apart from any influence exercised by Great Britain, had uniformly shown themselves benevolent to Christian communities. The Iraqi government, on its side, would see its frontiers garrisoned by a race of mountaineers whose vital interests were involved in resisting attacks from the north.[56]

Having decided to use the Assyrians to "mutual advantage," the British government notified the Iraqi government of its intention to demand the cession to Iraq of a portion of the Assyrian territory in Turkey. A few days after the conference had opened, the mandatory government in Baghdad issued an important announcement which began with these words: "His Majesty's Government have given the most careful consideration for some time to the question

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[52] Cf. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ḥasani, *Tarīkh al-ʿIrāq*, III, 294; Fāriq āl-Mazhar āl Farʿūn, *al-Ḥaqā'iq al-Nāṣiʿah fi al-Thawrat al-ʿIrāqīyah* (Baghdad, 1952), p. 320.

[53] For further discussion of the rebellious Kurds, see below, pp. 185ff.

[54] For further background on the friendly character of Nestorian-Kurd relations, see above, pp. 61–62.

[55] See *Iraq Report, 1923–24*, p. 34.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

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of safeguarding the interests of the Assyrian people, keeping in view both the services which they rendered to the Allied cause during the war and their future relations with the Iraqi State. They have decided to press for a frontier as far north as possible so as to include the greater part of the Assyrian people other than those who belong to districts subject to the Persian Government."[57]

Besides the land thus hoped to be secured, the announcement stated that there were sufficient deserted lands, the property of the Iraqi government, to the north of Duhuk, in Amadiyah and the northern hills upon which other scattered Assyrians whose homes were not in Persia could settle. The announcement revealed the following two assurances which the British government had secured from the Iraqi government:

1) The Iraqi Government will assign the vacant lands under reference above to the Assyrians free of cost and on favorable terms.
2) The Iraqi Government will grant both to those Assyrians who are thus resettled in lands to be newly-assigned and to those of the Tiyari, Tkhuma, Baz and Jilu country (if secured for Iraq from the Turkish Government) a generous measure of liberty in the management of their own purely local affairs, such as the choice of their own village headmen and the making of adequate arrangements in each village for the collection and payment, subject to the supervision of the Iraqi Government, of such taxes as that Government may fix.

These proposals received their first setback at the Constantinople Conference when Fethi Bey refused to accept, even in principle, the new British line. The dispute was then placed by the British government on the agenda of the thirtieth session of the Council of the League of Nations.

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[57] Text in *Colonial*, no. 58, pp. 268–269; see also ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ḥasani, *al-ʿIrāq fi Dawray al-Iḥtilāl wa-al-Intidāb* (Baghdad, 1935), I, 292–293.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE INEVITABLE CLASH

At the League of Nations Great Britain continued to press for a frontier to the north of the province of Mosul disregarding the fact that the question at issue was not the Nestorian homegrounds in Hakkari but the fate of the Mosul vilayet itself. The British memorandum[1] submitted to the Council of the League repeated substantially the same argument that Sir Percy Cox had raised at Constantinople;[2] he now concluded with the statement that the exclusion of the Hakkari territory from Iraq would, apart from economic and strategic disabilities, produce such a panic among the Assyrians that they would find no alternative but a resort either to mass emigration or to a fight to the death in defense of their ideals.

Referring to the arguments advanced by the British in behalf of the Christian community, "to which a remarkably large space is given," the Turkish government found it advisable to consider the question in an almost equally large space. The Turkish memorandum accused Britain of making an appeal "to sentiments of Christianity in general." The sympathy of the British government for the Assyrians, the Turks argued, could never justify the separation from Turkey of a large province in which the Assyrians scarcely formed one-seventeenth of the population. Moreover, the Assyrians were not indigenous to the vilayet of Mosul; if they were forced to leave their native country in Hakkari during the war, it was because they had taken up arms against their Muslim compatriots.

The Turks suspected the real motive behind the British proposal to assemble the Assyrians in a compact mass on the southern frontier of Turkey. Their memorandum concluded with these words: "The artificial grouping on the frontier of Assyrians who might be utilized against the Kurds and who would be animated by a desire of aggression against Turkey certainly cannot be expected to produce

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[1] Texts of both British and Turkish memoranda are published in the League of Nations, *Official Journal*, vol. 5, no. 10 (October 1924), 1566–1583.

[2] For further discussion of British-Turkish negotiations, see above, pp. 166ff.

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the results that the British Government hopes to obtain, namely, the establishment of a lasting peace in these regions, good relations between Turkey and Iraq and the possibility of a safe existence for the Assyrians."

After hearing the representatives of the two countries, the League of Nations Council decided to set up a Special Commission of three members to investigate the facts of the disputed area on the spot in order to assist the Council in reaching a decision. In the meantime the Turkish government attempted to extend its administration into the Hakkari district claimed by Great Britain. A Turkish force was sent into the district a few weeks before the arrival of the League of Nations Special Commission; it burned and plundered the reconstructed Christian villages, driving about eight thousand of their inhabitants southward into the Anglo-Iraqi territory, where most of their able-bodied men were serving as British mercenaries. Thus, when the Special Commission arrived on the scene to settle the frontier problem between Turkey and Iraq, the resettlement effort of the three preceding years was all undone.

The Mosul Commission and the Assyrians

After an extensive investigation the Mosul Commission pointed out that "The Assyrian question was the principal argument advanced by the British Government" in defense of the frontier which that government advocated.[3] When the members of the Commission arrived in Iraq they were told by the British authorities that the future treatment of the Assyrians would depend entirely on the decision taken with regard to the frontier. If the frontier advocated by the British government were not accepted, then the Assyrians could not be granted any local autonomy because in that case they would not be settled in homogeneous communities. Even if lands were available in Iraq, the commissioners were told, the Assyrians could not live in the plains owing to the climatic conditions.[4]

After hearing both parties to the dispute and after much detailed investigation on the spot, the Commission came to the conclusion that the British government's claim to a frontier beyond the Mosul

[3] Commission Report, 88.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 83; cf. *Colonial, no. 58*, p. 270; *Iraq Report, 1927*, pp. 32–33.

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vilayet was "not justified." The Commission, therefore, decided not to take into account in its conclusions the principal argument the British government had put forward for the frontier that it advocated. To the Commission the problem to be solved was not the future security of the Assyrians but the future status of the entire vilayet of Mosul. In its report the Commission pointed out its disagreement with the British view, "so often put forward in British documents and speeches," that the question at issue was the mere tracing of a frontier to the north of the vilayet of Mosul and not the fate of that entire province. The problem to be solved was not merely that of fixing a frontier line "as the British Government argues"[5] but that of determining the fate of a large territory and a considerable population. It was true enough that the dispute related ultimately to a frontier question, but it was clear that the territory between the lines proposed by the British and Turkish governments respectively "is too large for it to be said that the question is merely one of delimitation."[6] The entire vilayet could, under certain conditions, be returned to Turkey whose legal territory the province of Mosul still was "until that Power renounces her rights."[7]

As for the Assyrian Hakkari districts to the north of the vilayet of Mosul, the Commission felt that these formed "a territory which indisputably belongs to [Turkey]." The British solution was not "consonant with the principles of equity which should govern the desired settlement."[8] The members of the League Commission stated that in their opinion the most satisfactory solution would be for the Assyrians to accept the offer made by the Turkish delegate at the Constantinople Conference: "that they should be allowed to return to their former home," where, added the commissioners, they "must continue to enjoy the same local autonomy as formerly." According to the Commission, the Assyrians formerly enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy under the government of their patriarch.[9] The commissioners disregarded the Turkish position made at the Lausanne Conference; there the question of autonomy for the "Assyro-Chaldeans" had met with an absolute and clear refusal by the Turkish delegation.

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[5] *Ibid.*, p. 56.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 17. See map.
[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 89–90
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 83, 88.
[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 81.

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The Special Recommendations

The commissioners realized that the Assyrians, like most of the other Christian and minority groups of Mosul, preferred to stay in British-mandated Iraq rather than in Turkey.[10] Taking the much publicized case of the Assyrians into consideration, the commissioners made certain recommendations in their behalf which, besides those that they made in favor of the Kurds, were exceptional. In the last chapter of its report, the Commission made its "General Conclusions"; under a section entitled "Special Recommendations," which were "of vital importance for the pacification of the country and the welfare of its people," it wrote the following:

> Since the disputed territory[11] will in any case be under the sovereignty of a Moslem State, it is essential in order to satisfy the aspirations of the minorities—notably the Christians, but also the Jews and Yezidi—that measures should be taken for their protection.
>
> It is not within our competence to enumerate all the conditions which would have to be imposed on the sovereign State for the protection of these minorities. We feel it our duty, however, to point out that the Assyrians should be guaranteed the re-establishment of the ancient privileges which they possessed in practice, if not officially, before the war. Whichever may be the sovereign State, it ought to grant these Assyrians a certain local autonomy, recognizing their right to appoint their own officials and contenting itself with a tribute from them, paid through the agency of their Patriarch.
>
> All the Christians and the Yezidi should be assured of religious freedom and the right of opening schools . . .[12]

It is important to emphasize at this point that when the Mosul Commission wrote its conclusions, it made three alternative recommendations, and not one, with regard to the future of the vilayet of Mosul. Of these recommendations the most favored was that the whole territory "south of the Brussels line" be united with Iraq, subject to two conditions: (1) The territory must remain under the effective mandate of the League of Nations for a period of twenty-five years unless Iraq attained independence before the expiration of that period; and (2) to secure for the Kurdish population of Iraq

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[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 78, 83. Cf. *Colonial, no. 58*, p. 271.

[11] Obviously meaning the vilayet of Mosul, and not Hakkari as the British mandatory power would later successfully misinterpret.

[12] *Commission Report*, pp. 89–90.

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guarantees regarding local administration. Without the effective guidance of the mandatory, the Commission recommended that it would be more advantageous for the province of Mosul to remain under the sovereignty of Turkey, whose internal conditions and external political situation were incomparably more stable than those of Iraq. The third alternative recommendation provided for the partition of the vilayet in the event the Council considered it equitable to do so. In this case, a line following the course of the Lesser Zab was suggested as the best boundary.

The Commission was not sure which one of these three recommendations the Council would follow; we read in its conclusions such statements as "if the disputed territory returned to Turkey . . ." and "if the disputed territory is assigned to Iraq . . ."[13] clearly indicating that the Province of Mosul might go to one or the other party. In any case the "disputed territory" is the area "south of the Brussels line" which was a provisional line agreed upon at Brussels in October 1924 and which closely followed the traditional northern boundary of the Mosul vilayet.

When the League of Nations Council awarded the vilayet of Mosul to Iraq in its resolution of December 16, 1925 it defined the territory very strictly and in accordance with the recommendations of its Commission.[14] It cannot be overemphasized that when speaking of "the disputed territory" in its concluding chapter, the Commission meant the province of Mosul to the south of the Brussels line.[15] This area certainly did not include the Assyrian district to the north of the Brussels line because the Commission had already established that that territory was "indisputably" Turkish. "If a portion of the Vilayet of Hakkari were taken from Turkey," wrote the Commission, "her rights over that territory would be infringed."[16] We shall soon see how official British documents have interpreted the term "disputed territory," as it appeared in the above recommendations in behalf of the Assyrians, to mean the Assyrian homegrounds to the north of the Mosul vilayet, claimed by Great Britain.

When the Council awarded the vilayet of Mosul to Iraq it also took the special recommendations of its Commission into consideration

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[13] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

[14] See "Decision relating to the Turco-Iraq Frontier . . .," *Parliamentary Papers*, 31 (1924–25), Cmd. 2562, 2–3.

[15] See map, p. 170.

[16] *Commission Report*, p. 85.

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together with the two main conditions[17] of the award. Paragraph 4 of that resolution, which referred to the special recommendations, read: "The British Government, as Mandatory Power, is invited to act, as far as possible, in accordance with the other suggestions of the Commission of Inquiry as regards measures likely to ensure pacification and to afford equal protection to all the elements of the population . . ."[18]

In accordance with the above Council resolution a new treaty between Great Britain an Iraq was finally signed on January 13, 1926; the treaty was approved by the Council on March 11, 1926 for a period of twenty-five years from December 16, 1925, "unless before the expiration of that period Iraq shall have become a Member of the League of Nations." According to the Preamble of this treaty, the High Contracting Parties, "Anxious to give full effect to the stipulations in the decision of the Council of the League of Nations dated the 16th day of December, 1925 . . . have decided by means of a new Treaty to ensure due fulfillment of the said stipulations."[19]

The Permanent Mandates Commission and the Special Recommendations

When the Permanent Mandates Commission examined the mandatory government's reports on Iraq, it put special emphasis on paragraph 4 of the Council resolution of December 15, 1925. This paragraph was communicated to the Permanent Mandates Commission by the Council requesting that it be taken into consideration when annual reports on Iraq were examined.

During its first session on Iraq, the Permanent Mandates Commission took cognizance of the "somewhat uncertain" position of the Assyrians and invited the mandatory to furnish additional information regarding them on the points included in the special recommendations of the Mosul Commission.[20] A year later, at its twelfth session (October

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[17] (1) That the mandatory regime continue for twenty-five years, unless Iraq were admitted as a member of the League before the expiration of that period, and (2) to secure for the Kurdish population of Iraq guarantees regarding local administration.

[18] Text in *Parliamentary Papers*, 31 (1924–25), Cmd. 2562.

[19] See *Official Journal*, 7 (April 1926), 550–551, 502–503.

[20] *Minutes of the Tenth Session of the Permanent Mandates Commission*, p. 184. See also *Minutes of the Nineteenth Session*, pp. 94, 207–208, hereafter cited as PMCM.

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24–November 11, 1927), the Mandates Commission recalled the recommendations made by the Mosul Commission concerning the autonomous position to be given to the Assyrians and wanted to know what was being done to implement them.[21]

The British mandatory representative explained that in view of the final location of the Turko-Iraqi frontier, it was virtually impossible for Iraq to carry out the above recommendation. M. d'Andrade, the Portuguese member of the Mandates Commission, reminded his colleagues and the British representative that the recommendations of the Mosul Commission were made at a time when it must presumably have realized that "the frontier would not be fixed any further to the north than was eventually the case."[22] The British representative conceded that the Mosul Commission must have realized that the frontier would not be any farther north than it actually was when it made its recommendations, but, he explained, it perhaps did not fully realize the number of people who would be deprived of their ancestral homes by that situation of the frontier, for whom the Iraq government would have to find homes.

M. d'Andrade then wanted to know to what extent the specific recommendations of the Mosul Commission regarding the Assyrians had been or would be given effect to in view of the fact that communities of some size, entirely Assyrian in character, had been and would be formed,[23] granting that their scattered condition had prevented the creation of a large, autonomous district for them. The British representative stated that all non-Muslim minorities were free to maintain their communal spiritual councils, which dealt with all questions of personal status in accordance with the laws and customs of each community. As for taxes, the Assyrians paid practically none at that time. Moreover, the Assyrians were closely connected with the British-officered "Iraq levies" and if they had any complaints to make they "usually made them known through the commander of those levies."[24]

At the end of the session the Mandates Commission again expressed dissatisfaction with what it had heard from the mandatory power and asked to be informed of the measures taken in pursuance of the

[21] PMCM, 12 Session, pp. 24–25, 28–29.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 54.
[23] *Iraq Report, 1926*, p. 18.
[24] PCMC, 12th Session, p. 25.

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recommendations of the Mosul Commission concerning the minorities and to have precise information in regard to the circumstances which have retarded the adoption of these measures or which might be obstacles to the fulfillment of these recommendations.[25]

Great Britain Misinterprets the Special Recommendations

Faced with this insistence by the Permanent Mandates Commission, the mandatory power seems to have tried to do away with the entire question of the special treatment of the Assyrians as recommended by the Mosul Commission by invalidating those recommendations. In its report to the fourteenth session (October 26–November 13, 1928) of the Permanent Mandates Commission the mandatory power explained that the Mosul Commission's recommendations with regard to the Assyrians were "applicable to the Turkish Government," and had nothing to do with Iraq when the "disputed territory" had been "allotted to Turkey."[26]

The Mosul Commissioner's recommendations had read: "Since the disputed territory will in any case be under the sovereignty of a Moslem State," certain measures should be taken for the protection of the minorities—"notably the Christians, but also the Jews and Yezidi"—and "whichever may be the sovereign State, it ought to grant these Assyrians a certain local autonomy . . ." The mandatory power argued that by "disputed territory," in the sentence just quoted, the Mosul Commission meant the Assyrian lands in Hakkari! This British argument is presented as follows in the *Special Report . . . on the Progress of Iraq . . . 1920–1921 (Colonial, no. 58)*, an official report that has served as an invaluable, though misleading, source material for the scholar: "When the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry in regard to the Assyrians were examined, one difficulty at once became apparent. The recommendations appeared to be based on the assumption that the Assyrians would return to their former homes north of the frontier, as is implied by the opening phrase 'Since the disputed territory will in any case be under the sovereignty of a Moslem State . . .' In recommending that 'whichever may be the sovereign State, it ought to grant these Assyrians a cer-

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 200.
[26] *Iraq Report, 1927*, pp. 32–33.

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tain local autonomy . . .' the Commission did not contemplate that, whereas the disputed territory would be under the sovereignty of Turkey, the Assyrians would remain under the sovereignty of Iraq."[27]

In further support of their above misinterpretation, the British authorities restated the arguments they presented to the commissioners when the latter first arrived in Baghdad; arguments which, as we have seen, the commissioners found unfair and not justified. Furthermore, the British authorities had not only misquoted the Commissioners' report, they even took the position that the Commissioners had completely accepted the British arguments instead of rejecting them.[28]

The mandatory government's assumptions are basically wrong when they interpret "disputed territory" as meaning Assyrian homegrounds and not the vilayet of Mosul. The opening phrase "Since the disputed territory will in any case be under the sovereignty of a Moslem State . . .," clearly meant that the Assyrians, even though staying in Mosul, would be under the sovereignty of Turkey if the vilayet of Mosul were awarded to Turkey. If the province were awarded to Iraq, then the Christian community would again be under the sovereignty of another Moslem State, Iraq. The Mosul Commission had at the very beginning of its investigation expressed its disagreement with the British view—"so often put forward in British documents and speeches"—that the question at issue "is a frontier problem and not the fate of the Vilayet of Mosul." According to the Commission, "it is a fact that the two parties [Turkey and Great Britain] asked the Council of the League of Nations to settle the dispute and stated that the Council was entirely free to choose between the two lines proposed or to decide on any intermediate settlement." Between the British and Turkish lines lay a territory with "an even greater area than that of the Vilayet of Mosul and contains 800,000 people."

Misinterpretation Accepted

Very strangely, the Permanent Mandates Commission, during its fourteenth session, without even discussing the interpretation—rather,

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[27] *Colonial, no. 58*, p. 270.
[28] Cf. Commission Report, p. 83 and *Colonial, no. 58*, p. 270.

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misinterpretation—of the mandatory power, "recognized" that the recommendations made in 1925 by the Mosul Commission in favor of the Assyrian community had "become inoperative so far as Iraq was concerned." It will be remembered that during its twelfth session a year earlier, the Permanent Mandates Commission had stressed the fact, accepted by the British accredited representative present, that the Mosul Commission had made its recommendations in regard to the Assyrians "at a time when it must presumably have realized that the frontier would not be fixed any further north than was eventually the case." It is interesting to notice that the commissioner who had made this point clear, M. d'Andrade of Portugal, was not present at the fourteenth session[29] when the Commission recommendations were distorted. In its final report on this session the Permanent Mandates Commission wrote the following curious conclusion on the Assyrian problem:

> Indeed the information contained in the annual report and the statement made by the Accredited Representative show that the district in which the homelands of the Assyrian were situated was allotted to Turkey by the Council resolution of December 16th, 1925, and that the Assyrians who have taken refuge in Iraq are not prepared to return to Turkey. It is noted with interest [that measures are] taken with a view to the final settlement of these refugees on lands which the Government of Iraq will put at their disposal.[30]

It is incredible that the Permanent Mandates Commission should write that the district which the Assyrians occupied in Turkey before the world war were "allotted to Turkey" by the Council resolution of December 16, 1925. Indeed, the problem of the Assyrian districts in Turkey had no relevance to the issue with which the Mandates Commission had concerned itself during its last two sessions when it had discussed the settlement of the Assyrians in the vilayet of Mosul, recognizing the plain fact that the recommendations of the Mosul Commission concerned only Iraq and were a condition of the December 16, 1925 award of Mosul to Iraq instead of Turkey.

Having thus silenced the members of the Permanent Mandates Commission by convincing them that the recommendations of the Mosul Commission were "inoperative so far as Iraq was concerned," the Commission took no steps to dispel the false hopes of the Assyrians

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[29] See PMCM, p. 11.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 270.

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based on the recommendations now declared void. The foregoing decision of the League of Nations was not communicated to the Assyrians, most probably having been suppressed by the mandatory government lest the feelings of the minority be aroused at the obvious misinterpretation of the Mosul Commission's recommendations. Not aware that their settlement claims had been forfeited, the Assyrians looked naively forward to the day when their wrongs would be righted by the British mandatory power whose interests they actively served and whose regime they believed would continue for about twenty-five years.

When it finally dawned on the Assyrian leaders in 1930 that the mandatory regime was definitely due to terminate, they made representations and petitions to the British authorities[31] and the League of Nations[32] with a view to fulfilling and safeguarding their rights in Iraq where they had been made protégés of the hated mandatory.

Petitions in behalf of the Assyrians brought the special recommendations of the Mosul Commission before the attention of the Permanent Mandates Commission and requested that the Council of the League be advised "to set up a special Commission of Enquiry to determine to what extent the recommendations of the Mosul Commission have been carried out."[33]

Kurdish Protests

The Kurdish nationalists sent the League of Nations and the mandatory government their own protests against the absence in the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi treaty of all reference to the maintenance of Kurdish privileges as recommended by the Mosul Commission and the various League of Nations resolutions. In a petition sent to the League on June 26, 1930, the notables of Sulaymaniyah stated that in their opinion "the present administration will worse [sic] than that of Turks if Mandate is ended." They informed the secretary-general that "the final and definite decision of Kurds is to demand formation of

[31] The Assyrian Levies threatened to resign and actually did so for some time in 1931. (See Stafford, pp. 143, 145–146. For correspondence from the high commissioner to the Nestorian patriarch requesting the latter to intervene, see *Official Journal*, vol. 14, no. 12 [December 1933], 1796–1798).

[32] *Iraq Report, 1930*, pp. 25–26; PMCM, 19th Session, pp. 70–71, 163, 187–189.

[33] PCMC, 20th Session, p. 218. Cf. Stafford, pp. 1171–18.

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a Kurdish government under supervision of League of Nations."[34] Some of the Kurdish petitions demanded the establishment of an independent Kurdistan under the mandate of Great Britain, or any other power selected by the League; others asked for independent status under the rule of Shaykh Mahmud Barzani.

Kurdish anxieties soon expressed themselves in local disturbances and military activities against the government. In September 1930 Shaykh Mahmud invaded Iraq from his place of exile in Persian territory. Iraqi troops, assisted by the British Royal Air Force and Assyrian levies, fought him for the next seven months until he surrendered. Assyrian leaders had requested from the British high commissioner the promise that Assyrian troops not be used in operations against the Kurds in order that relations between the two communities would not suffer. The high commissioner's answer was that while he appreciated the Assyrian anxieties, he could not make the promise. He exhorted the Assyrians "to show to the Iraqi government their willingness to serve it with the same faithfulness with which they have served His Britannic Majesty."[35]

Special Recommendations Revived

On September 22, 1932, the Nestorian patriarch sent to the Permanent Mandates Commission a petition in which he referred to the recommendations of the Mosul Commission favoring local autonomy for the Assyrian. It was those recommendations, the patriarch stated, that led the Assyrians to vote for Iraq when the plebiscite for the vilayet of Mosul was taken. "The Commission's recommendations, however, were not followed, and the mandatory Power had revealed its intention of leaving the Assyrians of Iraq in their present state of insecurity."

The Permanent Mandates Commission did another strange thing at this juncture. Instead of reminding the Assyrians of its decision that the Mosul Commission's recommendations, the chief source of their claims, had been declared "inoperative," the Permanent Mandates

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[34] PCMC, 19th Session, pp. 184–185. For other petitions from Kurdish chiefs sent in 1930–1931, see *ibid.*, 20th Session, pp. 220–222; 21st Session, pp. 198–199.

[35] See *Oriente Moderno*, 21 (1941); consult also *Iraq Report, 1930*, pp. 24–28 and *1931*, pp. 171–9; the *New York Times*, October 25, 1930; February 9, 1931; *Athra* (Beirut), April 1, 1941.

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Commission itself revived the question of the recommendations. Even before it was bombarded with petitions, the Commission at its nineteenth session drew the attention of the mandatory government to paragraph 4 of the Council resolution of December 16, 1926.[36] Thus at this late date the Commission singled out the provision that the Assyrians "should be guaranteed the re-establishment of the ancient privileges which they possessed under the Turkish regime before the war; for example, a certain local autonomy, the right to appoint their own officials, the State contenting itself with a tribute from them paid through the agency of their Patriarch."[37] In the light of such encouragement and utterances—and confusion—the petitions of the Assyrians to the League of Nations do not seem far-reaching[38] or unreasonable, as admitted by the high commissioner in his letter to the patriarch of the Nestorians.[39]

During these deliberations the mandatory power did not remind the Permanent Mandates Commission of its decision of 1928 that the Mosul Commission recommendations had become "inoperative." The accredited representatives of Great Britain who appeared before the Commission after 1930 pointed out that the only solution for the Assyrians and the Kurds lay in their regarding themselves as Iraqis and being regarded as such by the Iraqi government; they discouraged the Commission from taking any unfortunate steps which might have a tendency to prevent the minorities concerned from regarding themselves as true citizens of the Iraqi state.[40]

The tragedy of the Assyrian case was that until the end of 1930 the British government did not advise the League in the manner above. Until then the mandatory government had emphasized her position as mandatory power when her representative appeared before the Permanent Mandates Commission, while ignoring that position in her dealings with Iraq.[41] This uncertain position of Great Britain

[36] The paragraph in question dealt with the special recommendations of the Mosul Commission. See above, p. 178.

[37] PMCM, 19th Session, p. 94.

[38] Cf. Stafford, p. 117.

[39] Text in *Official Journal*, 14 (December 1933), 1797.

[40] PMCM, 19th Session, p. 94; see also pp. 79, 80; *Parliamentary Debates House of Commons*, 255 (1930–31), 1797–1798; PMCM, 20th Session, pp. 122–123, 140.

[41] PCMC, 14th Session, pp. 168–169. Strictly speaking there had been no mandate for Iraq, whose relations with Great Britain were governed by a treaty which provided for a constitutional government for the Arab kingdom. According to the treaty, accepted by the Council of the League of Nations, Great Britain became a guarantor to the League for the fulfillment of certain obligations undertaken by the

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was doubly tragic insofar as the Assyrians were concerned. Not only were they considered as a privileged minority by the League of Nations—owing to the British demands in their behalf in 1924—but also they were singled out by the mandatory power who permitted among them the growth of a loyalty exclusively directed toward Great Britain[42] and a corresponding antipathy toward the Arab government that was even then theoretically, and was soon to become actually, their own.[43]

When it became clear that the future of the Assyrians would have to be assimilation within the frontiers of Iraq, the British, contrary to their own advice to the Mandates Commission in the early thirties, instead of pursuing a policy which held out hope for such an assimilation, persuaded a large body of the warlike Assyrian mountaineers to enroll as mercenary troops for the suppression of local revolts and the safeguarding of the resented British air bases in Iraq.[44] Instead of helping the Assyrians from the very beginning to make the best of what were disappointing circumstances and to carve out their own development as citizens of the Iraqi state, the mandatory power was advising the Assyrian patriarch as late as the summer of 1932 to put faith in the League of Nations, which Britain was doing its best to undermine,[45] and, as we have seen, confuse.

The task of a peaceful settlement was further complicated when a weak League of Nations emboldened the minority[46] to hope that their rights would be secured at the same time that the mandatory power encouraged the majority to believe that the international

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Iraqi monarch. For a study of the international status of Iraq before independence, consult W.L. Williams, "The State of Iraq: a Mandate Attains Independence." *Foreign Policy Reports*, 8 (1932), 184–194; E.P. MacCallum, "Iraq and the British Treaties" *Foreign Policy Association Information Service*, 6 (1930), 225–246; P.W. Ireland, *Iraq: a study in political development* (New York, 1938), pp. 277ff.; PMCM, 19th Session, pp. 86ff.; N. Bentwich, "The Sublimation of the Mandate for Iraq," *The British Year Book of International Law*, 11 (1930), 193–195; A.M. Margalith, *The International Mandates* (Baltimore, 1930), pp. 130–134.

[42] *Colonial, no. 58*, p. 271; PMCM, 20th Session, p. 25.

[43] Stafford, p. 70; W.A. Wigram, "Problems of Northern Iraq," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 15 (1928), 333; PMCM, 10th Session, p. 60.

[44] See above, pp. 164ff.

[45] See letters of the British high commissioner to the patriarch in the *Official Journal*, 14 (December 1933), 1796–1798.

[46] The Assyrian uneasiness was also stimulated and sustained by propagandists and sympathizers in Great Britain. See *The Times*, October 20, 1931; Hormuzd Rassam, "The Non-Arab Minorities in Iraq," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 18 (October 1931), 564–569; PMCM, 20th Session, p. 218; *ibid.*, 21st Session, p. 196.

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regime was a temporary makeshift. In the case of the Assyrians, the Permanent Mandates Commission, in spite of its great concern for the minorities, may be blamed for having confused the problem further by its inconsistency and, perhaps, inefficiency. It accepted the mandatory government's misinterpretation of the special recommendations in favor of the Assyrians in 1928, when there was still time to settle the issue, and reversed its position at a late hour, when it recommended the settlement of the Assyrians in one homogeneous group "with opportunities which would be in keeping with their traditions" even though the Permanent Mandates Commission would not encourage Assyrian aspirations to "the widest administrative autonomy."[47]

After every effort was made—for the first time in the history of this whole question—to take into account the now independent Iraqi government's point of view,[48] the Council passed a resolution which provided for the settlement of the Assyrians, so far as might be possible, in homogeneous "units" instead of the one unit that the Mandates Commission had recommended. The League Council noted with satisfaction that the Iraqi government intended to select a foreign expert to assist it in the settlement of "all the landless inhabitants of Iraq, including Assyrians."

The Nestorian patriarch, who was at Geneva at this time, wrote to the Permanent Mandates Commission pointing out the crucial difference between its formula and that of the Council,[49] but it was too late now. Just before his departure from Geneva, he received a letter from Nuri al-Sa'id, the Prime Minister of Iraq who was also there, informing Mar Shamun that upon his return to Baghdad he should go and see the Acting Prime Minister. For the first time since they were settled in Iraq, the Assyrians were to faced the realities of the situation.

Iraq Attains Independence

Encouraged by the recommendations of the Mosul Commission and the fact that their case was still being debated by the Permanent

[47] PMCM, 22 Session, p. 374.
[48] *Minutes of the Sixty-ninth Session of the League Council*, p. 1984.
[49] Text in *Official Journal*, 14 (December 1933), 1789.

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Mandates Commission, some Assyrian leaders naïvely insisted on attaining what the League of Nations had said the Assyrians had a right to.[50] Their insistence was basically due to a "profound uneasiness" about their future. In his last report on this uprooted community, the *rapporteur* of the Permanent Mandates Commission noted that the anxieties of the community were due to a number of factors, among them the sterility of the land which has been assigned to them, the precariousness of their rights to cultivate the soil, but more importantly, the scattering of their community among populations of other races. This latter circumstance was the cause of the individual acts of violence and attacks against persons and property which the Assyrians constantly complained of; they feared that now that the end of British control appeared imminent, the acts of violence against them "will be multiplied to the point of making the conditions of existence of their community definitely intolerable."[51]

Members of the Aramaic-speaking minority were also conscious of their own shortcomings; they had identified themselves with the despised British, but in whose power the Assyrians wholly found themselves. To the members of the majority, the non-Arab Assyrian Christians, were nothing but British protégés. Assyrian fears of persecution, however, were genuine despite assurances of men like King Faysal, who understood their problem and sympathized with their predicament.[52] As early as 1931, both the Christians and Muslims of Mosul were reported to be under great tension, apprehensive that a massacre was imminent.[53] It is essential to remember that fear, real or simulated, is at the basis of many a minority problem. In India it was fear of the Muslims that the Hindu majority would persecute them when the British control ended, that created the Muslim-Hindu problem. All the arguments of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, great believers in the equality of all religions and in a secular state, proved, on the whole, to be futile.

In the case of the Assyrians, their claims were such that they would not be granted by even a sovereign state, let alone by a new nation-state struggling for independence and for its very existence.

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[50] For a discussion of the role played by the Permanent Mandates Commission, see above, pp. 180ff.

[51] PMCM, 22nd Session, pp. 374–375.

[52] For more on the role of King Faysal in the "Assyrian Affair," see below, pp. 196–197.

[53] PMCM, 20th Session, p. 126.

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To the Iraqi nationalists, faced with a host of challenges that called for long-term, well-thought-out policies, the Assyrians were mere refugees who owed Iraq immense gratitude with no special rights to claim; the country certainly did not owe them any special rights that the other minorities of the land did not have. Herein lay most of the misunderstanding: the Iraqis interpreted the recommendations of the Mosul Commission the way the mandatory power misinterpreted and invalidated them[54] before the Permanent Mandates Commission in 1928.[55] Iraqi attitude toward the minority is best illustrated by Nuri al-Sa'id's observations on the Assyrian petition of July 17, 1932.[56] He regretted that the "sympathy" which Iraq had shown the Assyrian refugees had "become a reason for encouraging them to put forward demands most of which are unreasonable . . ." Nuri al-Sa'id suggested that the Assyrians "should avoid anything likely to embarrass the Iraqi Government or arouse the jealousy of other elements of the Iraqi nation."[57]

There had already grown an intense jealousy between the British-sponsored Iraq Levies and the Iraqi army, feelings that further increased the mutual suspicions of the minority and majority. The Assyrian soldiers took their clue from their British officers; it can "hardly be disputed that some of the junior British officers in the Levies were rather prejudiced against the Arab Government."[58] Some of the unruly mountaineers themselves had proved to be hard to control at times. A clash between the Assyrian Levies and the townspeople of Mosul in the summer of 1923 was followed in the spring of the next year by a much more serious outbreak at Kirkuk when two companies of the Levies "ran amuck" through the town shooting at the inhabitants, a number of whom were killed.[59]

With the increased restlessness of the Kurds and the Assyrians during the 1920s and early 1930s, a suspicion developed in Arab political circles that the British government wished to jeopardize Iraq's entry into the League of Nations by inciting the minorities

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[54] See 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, *Ta'rikh al-'Iraq*, III, 297–298.

[55] See above, "Great Britain Misinterprets the Special Recommendations," pp. 182–185.

[56] For a discussion of the Petition in question, see above: pp. 189, 190–91.

[57] Text in *Official Journal*, 13 (December 1932), 2291–2292.

[58] Stafford, *Tragedy*, p. 70.

[59] For the reasons behind this clash see *ibid.*, p. 67; Browne, *The Iraq Levies*, pp. 34–37; *New York Times*, May 10, 1924.

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against the Iraqi government and then claiming that Iraq was not yet ready to "stand alone." Some of the leading Iraqi nationalists, including King Faysal, were more suspicious of the French than of the British, especially after some of the Assyrians opted to seek a home in next-door Syria. It was feared that the French were trying to discredit Britain's policy to terminate its mandate in Iraq; King Faysal especially suspected the French of exploiting the Asyrian affair in order to strengthen the case for the continuation of their own mandate in Syria.

After Iraq attained independence, in October 1932, the government asked the "Nestorian" patriarch to stop participating in his people's political affairs. Upon his return from Geneva Mar Shamun had an audience with King Faysal and met with the Acting Prime Minister. The king, wrote the prelate, "as always, graciously expressed his goodwill towards my people and myself, as did the Acting Prime Minister."[60] The patriarch had himself given the impression that he would accept the decisions of the Council of the League of Nations.[61] Upon his arrival at Mosul in January 1933, however, Mar Shamun discovered that while he was at Geneva, the government had been busy with propaganda against him and had done its best to divide his people. It had taken into its confidence Nestorian religious and tribal leaders who were not on good terms with the patriarch, and had appointed his arch enemy as president of the Assyrian Settlement Committee.

It is to be noted that an increasing number of Assyrians had begun to turn away from the patriarch; bickering among the Assyrians often became sharp between those loyal to Mar Shamun and those who wanted to accept matters as they stood, feeling that their best interests lay in adjusting themselves as far as possible to life in Iraq. Indeed, a similar division was to be found in the case of almost every other minority; in each case there were mainly two parties, one purely communalist in outlook, the other realist. The former insisted on special provisions and safeguards for their sect or community while the other tried to demonstrate that no special concessions were necessary. Among the Assyrians the realist point of view

[60] *Official Journal*, 14 (December 1933), 1789.

[61] Royal Government of Iraq, *Correspondence Relating to Assyrian Settlement from 13th July, 1932 to 5th August, 1933* (Baghdad, 1933), p. 1.

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had been gaining ground since 1930; it was now encouraged and exploited by the government.

Thus ignored, Mar Shamun felt that his people were being "forced to submit to [a] policy which ignored the sacred minority guarantees given to the League of nations" and that the treatment he and his supporters were receiving was "a real foretaste of the type of rule we had expected."[62] Consequently he chose a policy of waiting and noncooperation and this hindered the work of the British land settlement officer hired by the Iraqi government in accordance with a League of Nations Council decision.[63]

The Iraqi government retaliated by summoning the patriarch to Baghdad for "consultation."[64] A few days after his arrival in the capital at the end of May (1933), King Faysal had left Iraq for a visit to England, accompanied by the British ambassador and the British adviser to the Minister of the Interior, three men whose tact and statesmanship might have resolved an extremely sensitive situation. The patriarch, a young man of only twenty-three, was informed by letter by the Minister of the Interior Hikmat Sulayman (brother of a former Vizier of the Ottoman Empire), that while the Iraqi government "desires to recognize your Spiritual See . . . over the Assyrian people . . . [it] cannot agree to transfer to you the temporal power and your position will be same as that of other spiritual heads of other people of Iraq." The Minister assured Mar Shamun of the government's "sincere desire to fulfill whatever is possible to see the Assyrian people satisfied and happy," and that "the Government by its declaration before the League of Nations has fully declared itself to this effect . . ." Accompanying Hikmat Sulayman's letter was the text of a written guarantee that he asked the patriarch to sign, promising that he would do nothing to make the government settlement scheme difficult and that he would "in all ways and at all times act as a loyal subject of the King."[65]

The patriarch answered that his "dominant desire" was to see his people happily settled as loyal Iraqi citizens but refused to sign the written promise "since such an action would only mean that I am willingly withdrawing myself from the duty to my people." His

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[62] *Official Journal*, 14 (December 1933), 1786.
[63] For a discussion of this decision, see above, pp. 188–189.
[64] *Official Journal*, 14 (December 1933), 1788.
[65] *Ibid.*

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"temporal" power and duty to his flock Mar Shamun vaguely defined as patriarchal authority which "is a great historical and traditional usage" descended "to me from centuries past as a legalized delegation of the people . . . and it is only to them to take it away."[66]

Irritated by the "obstinacy" of the young cleric, Hikmat ordered him not to leave Baghdad. In a letter toward the end of June Mar Shamun protested to the Minister that he was "quite prepared to suffer any further injustice that the Government may put on me," but he would in no way "submit to the methods which have been used to make me sign documents which betray my people into accepting an unreal fulfillment of the promises and recommendations of the League of Nations."[67] At this time King Faysal telegraphed from Europe requesting that the patriarch be allowed to go back to Mosul whether he signed any guarantee or not, but this only angered the Cabinet, some of the ministers threatening to resign.

The Community Alarmed

The forcible detention of Mar Shamun in Baghdad caused consternation among his followers in the north; anti-government feeling ran high throughout their villages. Offensive remarks made in the Iraqi Parliament against the Patriarch and his people, and a hostile press, poisoned the atmosphere further, creating greater tensions among the local population. It was at this time that the acting governor (*mutasarrif*) of Mosul called a meeting at his residence to which important Assyrian leaders were invited. The gathering was addressed by the acting governor as well as the British land settlement officer and Lt. Colonel Stafford, the administrative inspector for the Mosul area. For the first time the Assyrians were publicly told that the Council of the League of Nations had rejected their claims for an autonomous existence or for settlement as a homogeneous group. They were told that the Iraqi government had their interests at heart and advised them to take up the lands offered them as this was the only wise

[66] Compare Mar Shamun's claim with the patriarch's temporal status in the nineteenth century as discussed above, pp. The various patriarchs in Syria and Lebanon also applied for their privileges during the French mandatory period, citing ancient traditions. See B. Ḥubayqah, *al-Aḥwāl al-Shakhsīyah fi al-Jumhūrīyah al-Lubnānīyah* (Beirut, 1931) I, 30–33, II, 23–27.

[67] *Official Journal*, 14 (December 1922, 1802).

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course to pursue. At the same time, it was emphasized that their patriarch would have to restrict himself to spiritual matters. The mutasarrif explained that since the occupation of Baghdad the British had "conferred a temporal rule upon Mar Shamun in order to facilitate the recruiting business but this is not in accordance with the Iraqi Government and henceforth will be abolished."[68] Colonel Stafford dealt at length with the option of leaving the country for those Assyrians who did not wish to stay in Iraq. To emigrate to the neighboring countries was next to impossible, he warned, even though in Syria "the Assyrian young men could get employment in the Colonial French Army, but such service," he cautioned his audience, "is very difficult and has no prospect whatever."[69]

In Search of a New Home

The pro-patriarch faction, after coming to blows with their opponents at the end of the meeting with the acting governor, decided to seek a place of refuge in Syria. The French still retained the claim of protecting the Christians in the Middle East, and the Assyrians were of the opinion that the French government was favorably disposed to their settlement in Syria. Even before 1933, there had been rumors that France, alarmed over the possibility of Great Britain's early relinquishing of her obligations as mandatory in Iraq, might offer the Assyrians the protection that the British had refused.[70] Some 700 armed men, headed by Malik Yaqu, chief of the Tiyari tribe, and other tribal leaders loyal to the patriarch, including Malik Loco of Tkhuma tribe, crossed the Tigris into Syria. They had no warlike intentions and had left their women and children behind unprotected. They wrote the Minister of the Interior that the governor of Mosul "openly said 'those unsatisfied with this [government] policy, are free to do [sic] emigrate from Iraq.' Accordingly we have come to the frontier and we request the Iraqi Government not to block the road to those who want to join us. We got [sic] no intention to fight unless forced."[71]

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[68] *Ibid.*, p. 1804.
[69] *Ibid.*, p. 1805.
[70] *Iraq Report, 1931*, p. 23.
[71] *Official Journal*, 14 (December 1933), 1807.

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After the group had entered Syria in search of a refuge, the Iraqi government dispatched a force to the frontier to prevent their return except on the condition that they should surrender their rifles. In the meantime, French authorities were unable to meet the demands of the misled mountaineers; after spending about ten days in Syria they decided to return to Iraq, the majority of them realizing that they had been deceived by their leaders. At the river they came into contact with the Iraqi forces at Dairaboon. Most of these emigrants were ready to submit their arms but the "diehards" were determined to prevent it. A skirmish with the Iraqi army followed in the evening of August 4, turning into a battle that lasted well into the next day. About seventy Iraqi soldiers and officers were killed or wounded. Of this rebellious act Stafford wrote that he did not know who fired first; "I have had more opportunities than anybody else for making enquiries, but I do not know." Faced with heavy firing from the army machine guns, the Assyrians, who had lost twenty of their own men, realized they could not succeed. The majority of them recrossed into Syria; others, in a few groups of eight or nine each, headed toward their villages and families in Iraq.

The reaction to these events aroused violent feeling in Baghdad and Mosul. Atrocity stories were spread; it was rumored that 1,500 armed Assyrians were roaming about the country. King Faysal's own reaction to the Assyrians battling the Iraqi army was "as strong as that of the most extreme nationalists," according to Khaldun S. Husry's research of these events.[72]

The Summayl Massacre

A week after the frontier incident at Dairaboon an indiscriminate massacre took place during which about 600 Assyrian villagers were killed, mostly by the Iraqi army under the command of the anti-Assyrian General Bakr Sidqi, supported by the Iraqi police force and Kurdish irregulars. On August 11 about 300 men and boys were

[72] "The Assyrian Affair of 1933," *Journal of Middle East Studies*, 5 (1974), 161–176, and 5 (1974), 344–360. The Iraqi public, writes Husry, accused the monarch of being too moderate. For a critique of Khaldun's historical background of these events, see this writer's "The Assyrian Affair: a Historical Perspective," in *ibid.*, 6 (1975), 115–117. See also R.J. Stafford, "The Assyrians in the Mosul Vilayet," *Journal of the Royal Asian Society*, 21 (1934), 237–254; hereafter cited as *Lecture*.

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machine-gunned at the village of Summayl, two days after they had surrendered their rifles to the local police post in accordance with an official promise that if they complied they would be safe under the protection of the government.[73] Almost all the surrounding villages, some sixty in number, were looted by Arab tribesmen who were invited to join the pillage. The people of Sheikhan district "who had always been obedient to the government and had been anti-Mar Shamun, suffered the severest loss of all."[74]

Bakr Sidqi was given a hero's welcome in Baghdad for having crushed the "invincible Assyrians." The actions of the army were in large part concealed from the public, who were instead deceived by stories of widespread Assyrian rebellion, the gallantry of Iraqi troops, and the treacherous designs of Great Britain.[75] The "general line of policy" that General Bakr had adopted had been approved by Hikmat Sulayman, as admitted by him a few years later.[76]

Iraq Politics 1933

Before Iraq attained full independence in the fall of 1932, the two most important opposition parties in the country were the Sha'b (People's) Party, headed by the Sunni Yasin al-Hashimi, and the Watani (National) Party, led by the Shi'i Ja'far abu al-Timman.

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[73] Stafford, *Lecture*, pp. 245–246.

[74] Stafford, *Lecture*, p. 248. For an intimate and mainly objective account of the events by a man who took part as an intermediary between the Assyrians and the Iraqi government, see Stafford's *Tragedy*, pp. 132–208, often referred to in this work. For the Iraqi government point of view, see *Correspondence Relating to Assyrian Settlement . . .*, The Assyrian side is presented in detail by Yusuf Malek in his *The British Betrayal of the Assyrians* (Fair Lawn, N.J., 1935), and by Mar Shamun in his reports to the League of Nations Council reprinted in the League's *Official Journal*, December 1933. A detailed and scholarly study of this problem is found in Toynbee's *Survey of International Affairs, 1934*.

[75] Longrigg, *Iraq 1900–1950*, p. 235. King Faysal himself, writes Husry, constantly tried to "Whitewash the army," insisting in public that "no massacre of Assyrians had ever taken place in Iraq, and maintaining in private, to the very last, that the killings at Sammayl were not the work of the Iraqi army, but of tribesman."

[76] M. Khadduri, *Independent Iraq* (Oxford, 1951), p. 44. According to Husry, citing British Foreign Office sources, the events of August 4 and 5 had so agitated the King that he talked of going to the north, putting himself at the head of a national movement there to which he would summon the tribes of Shammar, the Jabur and others to join him. The British Ambassador to Iraq, quoting Nuri al-Sa'id in 1936, reported that "King Feisal had been the chief culprit" in the killing of the Assyrians. Husry, *op. cit.*, pp. 349–352.

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Both parties were bitterly opposed to the Anglo-Iraqi treaty of 1930, negotiated by Nuri al-Sa'id.[77] When the country became independent, the leaders of the two opposition parties pledged the nation never to recognize the treaty as binding in the event either one of them came into power. However, when Rashid 'Ali al-Gailani of the Sha'b party—now known as the Ikha' al-Watani (National Brotherhood) party—was offered the government in March 1933, he accepted, his party being convinced by the persuasive king that the treaty they opposed was not a bad deal after all. The Watani party of Ja'far abu al-Timman immediately retaliated by denouncing the Ikha' for the betrayal of their pledge to the nation. "The loss of prestige sustained by the Ikha Government not only shook the nation's confidence in the party system, but also reopened the old-standing Shi'i-Sunni controversy."[78] In the summer of 1933 the wave of agitation against the government in the Shi'i south was at its height.

It was in the midst of this serious split that the government of the seven-month old state of Iraq began to "settle" the Assyrian question. The Ikha' party had formed their government only two months before they summoned the patriarch to Baghdad. In the Assyrian "menace" an opportunity was found not only to close ranks with their former Watani comrades but also to divert the attention of the aroused public from themselves. They succeeded in their strategy. As a result of the atrocities in the north the nationalists forgot their differences even though momentarily. There was great excitement and fear that heavy-handed British intervention might turn the clock back. "The whole country to a man," wrote an observer, "believed that when Britain learned of the massacres she would stand by her [Assyrian] protégés—no other course seemed conceivable." But nothing happened. Upon his return to Baghdad the British ambassador made it clear "that the British policy was not to support the Assyrians, but to support the Arabs in the maintenance of the integrity of the Iraqi State."[79] With this assurance the stock of the Ikha' fell heavily and their government was under attack once more.

An important event that followed the massacres by less than a month was the untimely death of King Faysal, probably hastened

[77] This treaty was displaced by the ill-fated Baghdad Pact in 1955 also concluded by Nuri.

[78] Khadduri, p. 40.

[79] Stafford, *Tragedy*, pp. 195–197.

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by the bloodshed in the north. The king had returned to Baghdad from his European visit two days before the clash on the Syrian frontier had taken place. The situation at that moment was completely out of the monarch's control. Demonstrations demanding the elimination of the Assyrian community were a daily occurrence at this time.[80]

The friendship that developed between the politician Hikmat and the general Bakr during the Assyrian controversy bore bitter fruit for the country under the reign of young King Ghazi. In 1936 Bakr Sidqi assassinated the Minister of Defense Ja'far al-'Askari and was himself murdered a few months after that. The history of Iraq for the next few years is largely a record of army intervention in politics and of invitation by politicians for the army so to intervene. A series of *coups d'état* almost paralyzed the government.[81]

New Assyrian Home in Syria

After the tragic incidents of 1933, the Iraqi government urged the League of Nations Council that a new home should be found for those Assyrians who wished to leave or were unable peaceably to be incorporated into the Iraqi state. In December 1933 the Council set up an "Assyrian Committee" to prepare a scheme for their emigration and settlement; it started its task ambitiously and conducted a far-reaching search. It investigated the possibilities of settlement in Brazil and British Guiana, but both resulted in failure. Next it was decided to drain the marshy Ghab plain of Syria and there to establish the community of Hakkari. That scheme too was soon abandoned when the French decided to terminate their mandate in Syria—a decision later reversed—and the Syrian nationalists looked upon the settlement of a new Christian minority in their country as a dangerous experiment.

After four years of extensive investigations and land surveys, the League of Nations Council passed a resolution on September 29, 1937 that expressed its "deep regret that, despite all the efforts of its Assyrian Committee during the last four years, it has not proved

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[80] Khadduri, pp. 44–45. For the King's own reaction against the Assyrians, see above, pp. 196–197.

[81] Consult Khadduri's *Independent Iraq, passim.*

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possible to carry through a comprehensive scheme for the settlement outside of Iraq of all such Assyrians as have expressed the desire to leave that country."[82] In its report of September 29, 1937 the Committee had reached the conclusion that the settlement of Assyrians outside Iraq was not practicable. The political and economic conditions that prevailed during the 1930s, years of the Great Depression on the one hand, and of Nazi-Fascist expansion in Europe on the other, placed almost insuperable obstacles in the way of yet another Assyrian settlement.[83]

An obvious resolution of the problem was for the League Council to call for the improvement of those settlements in Syria which were temporarily established in 1933 for those Assyrians who had escaped Iraq in 1933; it called for their conversion into a permanent home for the Assyrians already there.[84] As for those Assyrians in Iraq who had expressed a desire to leave, the Council decided that they should remain there with those of their brethren who had not wished to leave the country, and together be incorporated as ordinary citizens of Iraq. In its resolution the Council took note of a declaration by the Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs, that "the Assyrian community in Iraq will now resume its position as an ordinary minority, which while enjoying the benefits of the declaration on the protection of minorities . . . will itself be bound by obligations of loyalty to the Iraqi state."[85] A report from the Iraqi government to the League Council in September 1938 showed that the autochthonous Assyrians lived in their prewar homes in Nirwah, Rayqan, and Barwar-i Bala, holding their villages, like their neighbors, by prescriptive right; the Hakkari Assyrians were mainly settled in Shaykhan, Amadiyah, Duhuk, and Zibar districts of the province of Mosul and in the Rawanduz district of the province of Arbil. Of the seventy-three villages settled by the Hakkari Assyrians twenty-four were owned by the government and forty-nine by private individuals. Detailed figures showed that the Assyrians were no worse off than their neighbors and were in some cases better off.[86] The report made no mention of the few

[82] *Minutes of the Ninety-eighth Session of the League Council*, pp. 927–928. See also the League of Nations, *Official Journal*, 18 (December 1937), pp. 1171–1199.

[83] *Ibid.*, p. 927. See also *Official Journal*, 18 (December 1937), pp. 1171–1199.

[84] The Iraqi government decided to forbid all travel in Iraq to the Assyrians located in Syria. Many, however, were able to return to Iraq in later years.

[85] *Minutes of the Ninety-eighth Session of the League Council.*

[86] Iraqi government report on the economic condition of the Assyrians in the northern provinces of Iraq, dated August 22, 1938, *ibid.*, September–October, 1938.

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thousand Assyrians who resided in the major cities of Iraq, directly unaffected by the settlement problems in the north.

Assyrian Settlements on the Khabur

The French government had established temporary settlements for the men who retired to Syria after the frontier incident of 1933 noted above. The families of these men were allowed to join them—some 2,100 persons in all. The settlement was expanded in 1935 to take about 4,000 more people, who directly or indirectly as a result of the massacre of 1933 were in a destitute condition in northern Iraq. The settlement was again expanded in 1936 by 2,500 people. They were transferred to Syria and settled there under the agency of the League of Nations with backing from England, France, and Iraq. They were settled on the banks of Khabur river in 32 different villages, Tell Tammar being the original one, about 150 miles from the Syrian-Iraqi border. Their first homes were domed huts built with mud bricks that resembled beehives. In its last report to the League Council, on the eve of World War II, the Trustee Board of the League spoke in 1939 of the Assyrians in Syria as a prospering community which enjoyed great security.[87]

Syrian lands situated just south of Turkey attracted large numbers of minorities from the Turkish side of the border, including Syrian Orthodox and Syrian Catholic, Chaldeans, Armenians, Kurds, and a few Jews.[88] They found refuge in Syria thanks to the public security established by the French occupation. Many of these refugees were victims of events of the early 1920s in the provinces of Cilicia and Turkish Kurdistan; they came and settled in Aleppo, Hims, Hama, and Damascus, but the majority found new homes and villages in al-Jazirah district of Syria, a "no-man's land" which before 1927 had practically no settled population except for about forty-five Kurdish villages, and a few nomadic tribesmen.[89] During the

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[87] See League of Nations *Official Journal, 20* (September–October 1939), 401. The Trustee Board was entrusted with the administration of the Khabur valley settlement. With headquarters at Beirut, it had as one of its members the late Bayard Dodge, president of the American University of Beirut. See his article "The Settlement of Assyrians on the Khabur," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 27 (1940), 301–320.

[88] John Hope Simpson, *The Refugee problem: Report of a Survey* (London, 1939), 556.

[89] As a result of the Kurdish revolts in the mid-1920s and 1930s in Turkey about

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interwar years (1919–39) the population of this northeastern corner of the country increased, bringing the number of villages and settlements to about 700.[90]

Gradually the region was transformed into a potentially explosive one, alongside other politically volatile provinces of Syria such as Jabal al-Duruz (Druze) and the Alawite region of al-Ladhiqiyah (Latakia). In one sense the Jazirah became more difficult to govern; it lacked the homogeneity that the Druze and Alawite districts had. Made up of a population that had recently fled from fire and famine, these former refugees dreaded the prospect of another exodus after the expected departure of the French, which seemed to be approaching in the mid-1930s; France in Syria and Lebanon, and England in Egypt and Iraq, were at that time willing to bring their special relationships with these countries to an end.[91]

Fortunately, the political tensions of Jazirah did not hinder progress. The region was a potentially fertile corner of Syria, its soil watered by the tributaries of the Euphrates river, the major one being the river Khabur, which flowed through the province from its source at Ras al-'Ayn on the Turkish border, down to the Euphrates, south of Dayr al-Zur. The Christian emigrants understandably felt unsafe and suspicious, but they were also a hardworking and frugal people; they soon proved to be a very valuable element, serving their neighbors as craftsmen, mechanics, electricians, shopkeepers, and entrepreneurs. Many Christians, especially "Jacobites" and Armenians, were relatively well educated, having attended American mission schools in Turkey. When World War II approached, the district had been turned into a productive area with many prosperous villages and two large flourishing towns—Qamishli, with a population of twenty-three thousand, of whom twenty thousand were Christians, and the ancient town of Hasaka, with approximately twelve thou-

twenty thousand Kurds came with their flocks and herds and settled in Syria along the Turko-Syrian frontier either in settlements of their own or on estates of Kurdish landowners For a detailed account of the refugee and emigrant beginnings in the Jazirah, see *ibid.*, pp. 458 seq.; See also Robert Montagne, "Quelques Aspects du Peuplement de la Haute-Djezireh," *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* (Damascus) 2 (1932): 53–66.

[90] See Simpson, *Refugee Problem*, pp. 458, 555; Andre Gilbert and Maurice Fevret, "La Djezireh Syrienne et son Réveil économique," *Révue de géographie de Lyon, 5* (1953): 9–10.

[91] For details on the tense political situation in the Jazirah during the pre-World War II years, see the author's *Muslim-Christian Relations*, pp. 105–110.

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sand inhabitants. In 1936 and 1937 the district, traversed by the Istanbul-Baghdad railway, exported by rail alone a hundred thousand tons of wheat in addition to what was transported to the rest of Syria by road.[92] The war years brought in even greater prosperity to the Jazirah as the Allies encouraged the production of foodstuffs within the Middle East. An official agency was formed during the war to help the province become a center for grain production. The high prices encouraged local enterprise; the number of tractors and harvesting machines increased from 30 in 1942 to 930 by 1950. The acreage under cultivation multiplied from fifty thousand in 1942 to over a million acres by 1950.[93]

The wealth accumulated during the war was invested in more intensive cultivation; the expansion in cotton production was now financed entirely from commercial as opposed to state capital. By the early 1960s, Doreen Warriner could write that the Jazirah was as fully mechanized as any other country in the world. She noted that the pioneers who changed these nomadic grazing lands to a highly mechanized agricultural region were for the most part Christian emigrants from Turkey—Armenians, Jacobites, and Syrian Catholics. There were Muslim farmer-entrepreneurs, but it was members of the Christian minorities who had taken the lead.[94]

Mutual appreciation gradually took the place of communal suspicion between the bedouin natives and the new inhabitants. The tribal shaykhs were the large landlords from whom the merchant-farmers rented the land and sometimes bought it, especially where, through pumped water, they irrigated it. The landlords' rent amounted from 10 to 15 percent of the gross produce; the merchant-farmers received from 45–60 percent of the crop on lands where they supplied the water; as owners of tractors and combines as well as pumps, they commanded up to 85 percent of the output.[95] With the agricultural

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[92] Simpson, p. 556.

[93] Norman N. Lewis, 'The Frontier of Settlement in Syria, 1800–1950," *International Affairs* 31 (1955): 59–60; George Kirk, *Survey of International Affairs 1939–1946* (Oxford, 1952), pp. 88–89, 122–23, 178–82, 299; Martin W. Wilmington, *The Middle East Supply Center* (London, 1971), pp. 119–22.

[94] Doreen Warriner, *Land Reform and Development in the Middle East: A study of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq* (London, 1962), pp. 74, 90–92.

[95] As in the case of the British in Iraq, the French mandatory authorities assigned the ownership of tribal lands—usually state lands which the tribes traditionally occupied and used for their flocks—to the tribal shaykhs. The latter became the legal owners of large tracts of uncultivated land, their tribesmen receiving nothing,

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boom, the tribesmen soon developed interest in farming; the shaykhs started to count their wealth in terms of bales of cotton and tons of wheat as well as in numbers of camels and goats.[96]

The political tensions of the Jazirah gradually subsided when the French finally left Syria in 1946. Their delayed departure made possible the realization by the minorities that they could no longer rely on French backing and intervention. This realization in turn reassured the Syrian government that the minorities would and could no longer be manipulated by a foreign power as in the past in order to retain its control over the country. President Shukri al-Quwatli's visit to the Jazirah was greeted with great jubilation in 1945.[97]

Independent Syria began to build on the foundations that the former refugees and emigres laid. The government, which, according to Doreen Warriner, had "done almost nothing to promote agricultural development in al-Jazirah," began to introduce irrigation improvements during the 1960s. A "new Jazirah" was envisioned when the building of the massive Euphrates Dam was started with Soviet aid in 1964. When the project was completed in 1973, it was considered the second largest electricity and irrigation facility in the Middle East after Egypt's Aswan High Dam. It is estimated that the harnessed waters of the Euphrates will eventually irrigate enough land to double the farmed areas of the country and make the Jazirah "one of the most attractive and prosperous provinces of the Arab world.[98] The economic potential for this corner of Syria was further

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even losing their rights to graze on lands which were rented or sold. During the mandatory period, the French authorities were often accused by the Syrian nationalists of willfully strengthening the bedouins as a force against the nationalist movement. *Ibid.*, p. 88. See International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *The Economic Development of Syria* (Baltimore, Md., 1955), p. 37. Andre Gilbert and Maurice Febret, "La Djezireh syrienne et son réveil economique," *Revue de geographie de Lyon*, 5 (1953), 93–97.

[96] It should be noted that traditionally the bedouins of Syria and Iraq have produced a large part of these countries' wool as well as their meat and dairy products. See Norman N. Lewis, "The Frontier of settlement in Syria, 1800–1950," *International Affairs*, 31 (1955), 59–60; Warriner, *Land Reform*, pp. 92–93; International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *The Economic Development of Syria* (Baltimore, Md., 1955), p. 292.

[97] Ishaq Armalah, *Athar Faransa wa-ma'āthiruha fi al-Lubnān wa-fi Sūrīyah* (Beirut, 1946), pp. 212–13. As late as the early 1960s foreigners were barred from entering the Jazirah without special government permission. See Gordon H. Torrey, *Syrian Politics and the Military, 1945–1958* (Columbus, Oh., 1964), p. 32; Warriner, pp. 86, 88.

[98] David Nicolle, "The New Jazira," *Middle East International*, 28 (Oct. 1973): pp. 26–28. See also *Daily Star* (Beirut), 6 July 1973.

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enhanced after independence when oil and natural gas were discovered, further encouraging the central government's involvement in both the security and progress of al-Jazirah.[99]

A Syrian Orthodox author touring the Jazirah in the mid-1960s noted the dramatic progress that the members of his community had made in the district after independence. The community had two secondary schools in Syria, one in Qamishli and one in Sadad; five intermediate schools, in Hasaka, Malkiyah, Fairuzah, Zaydal, and Aleppo; and elementary schools in the various towns and villages.[100] Those who more recently visited the Assyrian communities on the Khabur, speak of the impressive achievements of the new generation in the fields of medicine and other professions, and of the election of their representatives to the Syrian parliament in Damascus. A highly regarded Assyrian-American journalist-attorney who was there in the mid-1990s reported that the three Christian groups of the Syriac tradition in Qamishli "had more than sixty Assyrian physicians (10 of them female), covering all specialties." But he also noted that the monopoly the community has long enjoyed in the professions is a thing of the past, and so is its population, a decided minority, giving way to the influx of other peoples of the country, especially Kurds, who come to settle and work in this historic corner of their land.[101]

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[99] Irrigation projects in Turkey at the headwaters of the Euphrates river have for the past few years drastically reduced the flow downstream as the river winds its way through Syria and Iraq. The tense relation between the two riparian countries with Turkey have yet to be resolved.

[100] See Abrohom Nouro, *My Tour in the Parishes of the Syrian Church in Syria and Lebanon* (Beirut, 1967), pp. 31–32/292–93, where the Syrian Orthodox author lists the major centers of his community in the Jazirah.

[101] Francis Sarguis, "Some Personal Reflections," *Zenda*, vol. iii (July 14, 1997). During the mid-1970s the Assyrian ("Nestorian") population of Syria, mostly in the Jazirah, was estimated at approximately 30,000; in mid-1990s at 50,000. See Bayard Dodge, pp. 301–320; Xavier Jacob, "Die Christen im heutigen Syrien," *Stimmen der Zeit; Katholische monatschrift fur das geistesleben der gegenwart* 196 (1978): 345; Edwin Gania, "Assyrians of Syria," *Zenda*, vol. ii (July 15, 1996).

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CHAPTER NINE

BETWEEN MUTUALLY HOSTILE NEIGHBORS

The settlement of Assyrians in Iraq and Syria involved those segments of the community who were uprooted from their homes in Hakkari, in southeastern Anatolia, where the majority of the inhabitants are Kurds.[1] Although the Christians of Persia and their brethren from Hakkari were brought to Iraq by the British at the same time, the former refused to participate in any settlement schemes that did not include their native homeland in Persia. After their refugee camps were dismantled, the Assyrians of Persia scattered and would hear of nothing but return to their own beloved Urmiyah.[2] Despite the grave warnings of the difficulties they would encounter, practically all of them decided to reach Persia via Baghdad. As many as could do so, but less than a thousand in all, went to Europe and America to join relatives and friends. The rest, with the exception of about two thousand who stayed in Baghdad, had made their way back to Persia by the beginning of 1922. Of these there were approximately five thousand in Hamadan, one thousand in Kermanshah and four thousand in Tabriz and Maraghah.

Although anxious to return to their villages and vineyards, they had to wait for a politically suitable time. The Persian authorities had given assurance that not only would the Assyrians be allowed to go back to rebuild their destroyed homes but they would be encouraged to do so when peace was restored in their region. After Riza Khan's troops had attacked and dispersed the Kurdish chief Simko's forces in the Urmiyah region by August 1922, about half of the Nestorians who were in Persia returned to their native province and were joined by others later. Barred entry were a few members of the community found unacceptable as a result of their past political activities.

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[1] See above.

[2] For their brief refuge in Iraq, see above, pp. 154–156.

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The Missionaries also Return

The American missionaries were equally anxious to return to Urmiyah. From the very beginning it had been the purpose of the Presbyterian Board to resume the work in northwest Persia at the earliest possible date. "The needs of the work and the field, our obligations alike to the Mohammedans and the Assyrians, and our solemn duty to the past make it binding upon us to go back . . . the instant that way is open." According to the Secretary of the Board, the Nestorians were still to be regarded as a great reservoir of spiritual resources for the work among the Muslims. A number of the leading evangelists for Persia, the country where the missionaries were comparatively more successful in their work among Muslims, were native Christians, products of the Nestorian Mission.

By late 1923 most of the members of the mission, old and new, were reassembled and ready to rebuild their ruined churches and schools. In 1928 there were four "Assyrian Evangelical Churches"; the well-known Fiske Seminary for women and the ninety-year-old American School for Boys were reopened, the latter having "one of the best structures in Urmia." There were also twenty elementary and intermediate schools throughout the Christian villages, while a modern hospital and dispensary and a school for nurses served the medical need of a vast territory. About a dozen years of service and rehabilitation seemed to have brought things back to normal. The ruined Urmiyah church "will be rebuilt," stated the Presbyterian Board confidently; it "is confronted now with an hour of great opportunity."

During these early post-World War I years, the Presbyterian Board's optimism was shared by the missionary establishment throughout the Muslim Middle East. Thanks to the Allied victory, which had brought to an end the 400–years old Ottoman empire, whose sultan was also the caliph of the Sunnite Muslim world, the attention of the Christian West during the post-World War I period was focused upon the Muslim world as it had never been during the previous century. Speaking during that world conflict, the veteran missionary Samuel Zwemer took it as God's eternal purpose that Arabia proper, the motherland of Islam, should also be part of the Kingdom of Christ. "Our marching orders include Arabia," he confidently announced. And when the war was over, he thought that Middle Eastern countries, which had been "closed with iron gates and bars of brass,"

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were now thrown wide open. The Cross of Christ "may once more come to its own in the land where Jesus Christ gave His life for the world."[3]

In a regional missionary conference held in Jerusalem in 1924 for the Protestant workers among Muslims of North Africa and the Middle East, "unmistakable evidences" were seen of the "weakening or disintegration of Islam." Much hope was placed upon the fact that the new mandates under European powers contained promises of "religious freedom." Summarizing the "Findings" of the conference, John R. Mott, Chairman of the International Missionary Council, announced that while "formerly indirect methods of approach were necessary on account of government restrictions and Moslem opposition and fanaticism . . ., in many lands today the way is open to widespread and direct evangelization."[4] As late as 1937 an editorial in the *Missionary Review of the World* spoke of the Muslims as a people of strong character who take their religion and its obligations seriously; but they may yet "be transformed into Christian graces when touched by the Holy Spirit."[5]

Unfortunately for the missionary establishment, the reality was different, especially in lands where Muslims lived in a sovereign state, such as Iran. There, despite the fact that the Nestorians were encouraged to return, restrictions imposed on mission schools started as early as the late twenties, under Reza Shah I, founder of the newly-established Pahlavi dynasty. In 1928 Christian schools in Iran were not allowed to teach the Bible to Muslim students and, shortly thereafter, all elementary schools conducted by foreigners for Persian children were ordered closed.[6]

End of the Nestorian Mission

All hopes for the further development of missionary work among the Christians were shattered by a decision of the Iranian government in 1934; a decree called on all foreigners to evacuate Azerbayjan. This was mainly a political decision; it was feared that the Urmiyah

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[3] *Missionary Review*, 37 (1914), 322–323; 38 (1915), 289; 43 (1920), 273. Zwemer had started a mission in Arabia in 1890.

[4] J.R. Mott, *The Moslem World of Today* (New York, 1926), pp. 261–379.

[5] *Missionary Review*, 60 (1936), 451.

[6] All foreign schools in the country were nationalized in the 1940s.

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region—scene of intrigues and disturbances in the past, due to its proximity to Russia, Turkey, and the Kurdish regions—might continue to be a storm center. The withdrawal of foreigners, most of them missionaries, would enable the government, without risking foreign entanglements, to deal effectively with any situation that might arise in the border provinces. The fact that the decision was taken only a few months following the tragic events of 1933 in Iraq,[7] would indicate that the Shah's government did not want the presence of the American mission to impede the nationalization of the Christians of Azerbayjan. Moreover, the presence of American evangelists there, with the educational and medical competition that their mission afforded, might even encourage separatist tendencies among non-Persian-speaking Muslim Azerbayjanis, such as the Kurds and Turkish-speaking Afshars, already agitated by Communism then taking root in Soviet Azerbayjan just across the border to the north.[8]

The evacuation of the American missionaries took place almost exactly one hundred years after the mission was instituted in Urmiyah; its closure was described by the Secretary of the Presbyterian Board as "a grievous course for the missionaries and their friends in the Board and the home church . . . but there appeared no alternative . . ." The Board voted that it "request the Mission to make the whole situation clear to the Christian people [in Urmiyah] and with full sympathy to aid them to adjust themselves wisely to the present conditions and to go forth as loyal citizens of Persia in full fidelity to the Christian spirit and to their Christian faith."[9]

The community adjusted to life without the missions; they lived securely in their fair province, undisturbed until yet another World War shattered the peace. History then seemed to be repeating itself; in 1941 the Allies found it necessary to occupy Iran. The northern provinces of the country were incorporated within Russia's own security zone. As World War II raged, the Soviets became as firmly in control of Azerbayjan as the Tsarist troops had been 24 years earlier.

Communist Russian occupation of Iranian territory was meant to be temporary. In a Tripartite Treaty reached in 1942, Soviet Union and Great Britain guaranteed the territorial integrity and political

[7] See above, pp. 195–196.
[8] Cf. A.J. Brown, *One Hundred Years* (New York, 1937), pp. 522–523.
[9] *Ibid.*

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independence of Iran and provided for the withdrawal of their forces six months after the termination of the war. When the war ended, the two countries set a definite date for the departure of their troops and agreed that evacuation should be completed by March 2, 1946. One month after this agreement was announced, a separatist revolt against the Iranian government broke out in Azerbayjan, center of the hard core of the Communist party (Tudeh), called the Democratic Party.[10] Battalions of the Iranian army on their way to the seat of trouble were turned back by Soviet forces; an All Peoples' Assembly of Persian Azerbayjan declared itself autonomous but within the Persian state. Soviet occupation authorities mobilized the local Assyrians and Armenians in support of the pro-Russian regime and by the end of 1946 the town of Urmiyah, reported *The Times* of London, was "surrounded by 3,000 Kurds, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Democrats."[11] By mid-December, Tabriz, the capital of Azerbayjan, was taken over by the "Democrats."

A "National Government of Persian Azerbayjan" was established which, while proclaiming its loyalty to the Persian state, was determined to preclude any interference by the Tehran government in the running of their province. In a manifesto adopted by the provincial government, under the leadership of Ja'far Pishavari, one of the immediate goals of the Democratic Party was said to be to set up a "national government" based on "truly democratic principles." Azerbayjani language, a dialect of Turkish,[12] was to be "immediately" introduced in all schools "as the state language." It was also decided to distribute among the peasants land that belonged to the state and to reactionary landlords who had fled Azerbayjan and were involved in anti-Azerbayjani activity. Together with the Shi'ah Azerbayjanis, who formed the majority, all the other inhabitants of the province, in particular Kurds, Assyrians, and Armenians, were to be equal in both rights and responsibilities.[13]

The revolt soon spread into Persian Kurdistan, south of Azerbayjan, and resulted in clashes between Kurds and the national army. In April 1946 a twenty-year treaty was concluded between the governments of Azerbayjan and Kurdistan. The preamble of the treaty

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[10] For Soviet activity in Iran during the Second World War, see I. Spector, *The Soviet Union and the Muslim World 1917–1958* (Seattle, 1959), pp. 194–200.

[11] *The Times*, December 17, 1945.

[12] See above, pp. 87, 91.

[13] *The Times*, December 18, 1945.

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stated that the Azerbayjani and Kurdish "nations" had been persecuted by the central government under Reza Shah for twenty years; the Second World War had now given the two nationalities the opportunity to secure their freedom. A manifesto, signed by Qazi Muhammad and 105 leading Kurds, stated that the Kurdish people wished nothing but the human and constitutional rights denied them by the former shah. The Kurdish Democratic party, the manifesto declared, will make special effort to establish unity and complete fraternity with the Azerbayjani people and the other peoples that live in Azerbayjan, such as the Assyrians and Armenians.[14]

After these disturbances the Russians announced that their troops would remain in Azerbayjan, "pending a clarification of the situation." It was reported at this time that Turkey, which was faced with the territorial claims of Soviet Armenia and Georgia, was worried about Russian troop movements toward Lake Urmiyah.[15] Faced with this hopeless situation, Iran brought the dispute before the United Nations, the first important international issue deliberated by the U.N. The Soviet Union, ostensibly forced to bow before world public opinion in this major debate, withdrew her troops but not until the Tehran government of Qavam-i Saltaneh had agreed to place control of Iran's northern oil fields in the hands of a Russian-organized company. This concession, however, the skillful Iranian Prime Minister had made subject to ratification by the Iranian parliament.

Following the Russian withdrawal, the Iranian government tried to negotiate with the "Azerbayjan Democratic Government." Qavan-i Saltaneh was able to direct the separatist movement into constitutional channels; an agreement was reached whereby the "national parliament" of Azerbayjan accepted the status of a provincial council enjoying important rights that included control of three-quarters of the large revenue it raised. The agreement also promised the Assyrians and Armenians "the same privileges as Azerbayjanis." As for the Kurds, their language would be taught in their elementary schools. In August 1946 the harmony thus restored was further strengthened by the inclusion of three members of the Democratic party (Tudeh) in the cabinet. How the party would fare in the

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[14] A. Roosevelt, Jr., "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad," *The Middle East Journal, 1* (1947), 250, 254–255.

[15] *The Times*, March 15, 1946.

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upcoming elections for the Iranian parliament, scheduled for the Fall of 1946, became the burning question.

Should the Tudeh communist party win or gain heavily, the Russian oil agreement would almost certainly be ratified. The party was strongest in Azerbayjan; elections there had to be "supervised." It was decided that government troops would be dispatched to all the provinces in order to insure "public order" and a "free and impartial verdict" by the people. The Azerbayjani leaders objected, contending that the dispatch of troops to their province constituted a threat to its existence; they issued a proclamation promising resistance "to the last drop of blood." Unhampered now by Russian troops, the Persian army marched in; resistance was feeble; Pishavari and the other leaders of the separatist movement fled. Qazi Muhammad, head of the short-lived but memorable Kurdish Republic of Mahabad, surrendered, pledging his support to the central government.

These movements were not unaccompanied by violence and human suffering. "The earthenware," as the saying is phrased in Syriac, "broke upon the head" of the Assyrians again. What the report of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions wrote in 1947 was reminiscent of events of earlier days. "The dominant Mohammedan population rose up against the minority community of the ancient Assyrian Christians and looted and killed. A number of the Assyrian villages were stripped utterly bare, homes completely destroyed . . . their animals were stolen and their supplies of grain carried off."[16]

The precarious situation in their home province gradually forced most of the able-bodied Assyrians to desert their ancestral villages permanently; they joined their relatives and friends in the major cities of Iran. In these urban centers the community lived in comparatively greater economic and political security that lasted for just over thirty years.[17] The Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s resulted in the emigration of large numbers of the Christian community from Iran and Iraq, most of them settling in the United States and Canada, the rest dispersed in Western Europe, New Zealand and Australia.[18]

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[16] *Annual Report* of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, 1947, p. 50.

[17] For more on life in Iran, after the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty, see pp. 222ff.

[18] According to *Zenda*, a weekly on-line Assyrian magazine, a statement issued by the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1999, based on the 1989 census, reported that there were 85 Christian Churches in the West Azerbayjan province of Urmiyah.

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Between Kurdish North and Arab South in Iraq

Unfortunately for the Christians of northern Iraq, the everyday problems that face them, now as in the past, have to do with their geographical location and the neighbors among whom they live, the Kurds, a much-maligned people themselves. As we have seen,[19] Christians in these formerly eastern provinces of the Ottoman empire lived for centuries on comparatively friendly terms with the Kurds—they spoke their language fluently and lived in villages close to theirs; sometimes they were neighbors in the same villages and towns. Christians either freely identified with the Kurds or had no other choice but to throw in their lot with them from fear of reprisal. When they did join the Kurds, reprisal came from their (Kurd's) enemies, be they another Kurdish tribe or faction, or the soldiery of the central government, be it the Ottoman state in Istanbul in the past, or the Ba'th government in Baghdad in our day.

This is not the place to analyze the fast-changing developments or the fickle agreements and alliances reached on paper that frequently take place between the various parties; what is constant is that whenever military measures were taken against the Kurds, the Christians also suffered. During the post-World War II period, especially after the overthrow of the monarchy in 1958, conflicts between the Kurds and the Iraqi government intensified. The revolution of that year was soon followed, in 1959, by Kurdish uprisings in the oil-rich region of the north, where massacres took place in the cities of Mosul and Kirkuk. The military government's repressive measures against the Kurds stopped the insurrection but not for long. The Kurds revolted again three years later because, they felt, the assurances given them in the late fifties were not being fulfilled. Unable to suppress the revolt, the leader of the coup that had toppled the monarchy, Abdul Karim Qasim, lost the support of the army and was overthrown early in 1963 and executed soon thereafter. By 1966 another "peace" with the Kurds was reached, but the worst was yet to come as battling with the Kurds grew to be horrifying.

In the summer of 1968 another military coup brought to power the Iraqi branch of the Ba'th party, under the leadership of Hasan al-Bakr. To consolidate its position the Ba'th regime tried first to pacify the Kurds; in 1970 they were offered recognition of self rule

[19] See above, pp. 62–63, and also the author's *Muslim-Christian Relations*, pp. 24 seq.

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and use of the Kurdish language in the Kurdish regions of the north.[20] Irreconcilable differences arose when the Kurds objected to the central government's exclusion of the oil-producing Kirkuk region from areas recognized as Kurdish. Negotiations broke down; the Ba'th government, by then dominated by Saddam Hussein, began losing patience. Kurdish demands for a truly autonomous Kurdistan within Iraq were now considered by the Ba'th regime as promoting separatism, chauvinism, and racism and were thus "criminally traitorous" acts.[21]

It was open war again in 1974. A government offensive that year forced 130,000 Kurds to take refuge in Iran. Kurdish as well as Assyrian villages were destroyed, their population uprooted. The Kurdish rebellion collapsed in 1975 after the Shah of Iran withdrew his country's aid to the Kurds in return for border concessions from Iraq in the Shatt al-Arab controversy. Then came the overthrow of the Shah and the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, headed by Ayatollah Khomeini, an arch enemy of Saddam Hussein who, also in 1979, became president of the Republic of Iraq. The two men started the Iran-Iraq war, a conflict that raged for almost exactly eight years—from September 1980 to August 1988. During the war, Iraqi Kurds living in towns and villages alongside the Iranian border, suspected of aiding the enemy, were "resettled." Their villages in the oil-producing regions were razed, their inhabitants relocated. Saddam was now determined to get rid not only of the Kurds but also of the Kurdish question. Heights of brutality were reached in his campaign cynically called The Anfal, a name derived from the eighth sura of the Qur'an.[22] The campaign lasted from February to September, 1988; it is estimated that government forces methodically destroyed 1,276 villages, killing "at least 50,000 and possibly as many as 1000,000 persons, many of them women and children."[23] Approximately 800,000 people are estimated to have been forced into "collective" towns, some of them in regions far removed from

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[20] To win over Assyrian loyalty, the government that same year invited Mar Shamun to visit his people, after almost forty years of exile. For details, see below, pp. 248–249.

[21] Kanan Makiya, "THE ANFAL, Uncovering an Iraqi campaign to exterminate the Kurds, *Harper's*, vol. 284 (May 1992), 54.

[22] The Qur'anic sura is meant to show that spoils of battle are legitimate to expropriate and redistribute among the faithful.

[23] Makiya, *loc. cit.*

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Kurdistan. In March 1988, 5,000 Kurds were killed in a poison gas attack in the town of Halabja.[24]

The international community did not notice. In the 1980s Saddam Hussein was a close friend of the West, holding back what then was viewed as an expanding Islamic tide from Iran. Almost a year before the the Iran-Iraq started, Iranian militants had seized the embassy of the United States, taking 62 Americans hostage; they were not released until January 1981. Saddam remained an ally of the United States until he invaded Kuwait in August 1990, almost exactly two years after the the Iran-Iraq ended. Once Iraqi armed forces crossed the border and overtook Kuwait, a U.S.-led coalition was mobilized and began a ground attack to retake Kuwait on February 23, 1991. The Iraqi forces were routed in four days, some 175,000 of them were taken prisoners, the casualties estimated at over 85,000. As part of the cease-fire agreement, Iraq agreed to scrap all poison gas and germ weapons, and to allow United Nations observers to inspect the sites. UN trade sanctions, according to the agreement, would remain in effect until Iraq complied with all terms. The deathly sanctions are still in effect at the time of writing (late 1999).[25]

Encouraged by the mass desertions from the Iraqi army, and by what seemed to be its utter defeat, much of Iraq's Shi'ite south rose in revolt. With most of Saddam's surviving forces committed to the south, the Kurds in the north saw an opportunity to unseat Saddam, their guerrilla forces started attacking Iraqi army units.[26] By March 13, 1991, what started as a popular revolt at Raniya, had spread to most of Iraqi Kurdistan, including Dohuk, Arbil, Sulaymaniya and Zakhu. On March 19, a successful Kurdish assault on Kirkuk brought that oil city under Kurdish control—but not for very long. To fight

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[24] "The Road to Genocide, 1975–1988," chapter heading in David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London 1997), pp. 343–367; Human Rights Watch, *Iraq's crime of genocide: the Anfal campaign against the Kurds* New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1995; Makiya, Kanan. "THE ANFAL, Uncovering an Iraqi campaign to exterminate the Kurds," *Harsper's*, vol. 284 (May 1992), 53–61; Ephraim Karsh, "Ordeal in Kurdistan," *Times Literary Supplement*, August 27, 1993, p. 23.

[25] Saddam's government has yet to comply with the terms that ended the war. No solution has been found to the enormous human suffering of the Iraqi people; UNICEF reported in 1996 that 4,500 Iraqi children were dying monthly due to food shortages, malnutrition-related infectious diseases, and a shortage of medical supplies. The country's infrastructure was destroyed, including its electric, water purification and sewer treatment plants.

[26] According to Mas'ud Barzani, "The uprising came from the people themselves. We didn't expect it." See McDowall, pp. 371–372.

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the rebels Saddam used his elite Republican Guards, left almost unscathed by the Persian Gulf War. In a replay of the 1988 campaign, the Guards, in a murderous spree, used heavy artillery, tanks, and helicopter gunships. Kurdish insurgents and civilians were driven to the borders of Iran and Turkey, causing a refugee crisis of immense proportions. The memories of the Anfal campaign still fresh in their minds, nearly a million and half people fled to the snow-covered mountains in February 1992 to escape the advancing army.

Moved by scenes of barefooted women and children in sub-zero temperature, public criticism of the United States and its allies mounted. "There was a distasteful contrast," writes David McDowall, "between the Coalition's readiness to fight to protect oil and reinstate an autocratic regime in Kuwait and its reluctance to protect Kurds and Shi'is." The British newspaper *The Independent* pointed a finger at President Bush: "The man [Bush] who reportedly told the CIA in January to provoke the Kurds into insurrection and preached rebellion during the Gulf War, now acts like someone with a nasty bout of amnesia."[27] Anxious to resolve the crisis on their border without giving the Kurds refuge, the Turkish government called for the creation of a "safe haven" for the refugees within Iraq while allowing some of them to cross the border. Iran, by contrast, was hospitable; it allowed its own Kurds to open their homes, schools and mosques to their refugees brethren, the government itself setting up emergency camps for almost one million people. The idea of a safe haven was adopted; a U.S.-led air force based in Turkey protected the Kurdish region above the 36th parallel as a no-fly zone.[28]

The Ba'th government's policy of discriminatory resettlement, demolition of villages, and forced relocation was applied indiscriminately to Kurds, Turkomans, Assyrians, and other minorities. The Assyrian Christians of the north, often suspected by the Iraqi government of collaborating with Kurds, were harassed and killed

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[27] McDowall, pp. 373–375.

[28] Middle East Research and Information Project, Iraq, *Why the Uprisings Failed.* Washington, D.C. 1992; John Bulloch, *No friends but the mountains: the tragic history of the Kurds.* London, 1992; U.S. Agency for International Development, Bureau for Humanitarian Response, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, *Northern Iraq—Displaced Persons,* Washington, D.C. August 11, 1995. Helena Cook, *The Safe Haven in Northern Iraq: International responsibility for Iraqi Kurdistan.* London—Human Rights Centre, University of Essex; Kurdistan Human Rights, Project—1995.

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throughout the region; numerous of their churches were destroyed during the Anfal campaign. The same tragedy overtook them in early 1990s.

Out of Saddam Hussein's reach in the no-fly zone, the Kurds began to reconstruct their life. They declared a Kurdish autonomous regime and started to establish their own ruling institutions. The two main political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) of Mas'ud Barzani and Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) had early declared their intention to replace the old Kurdish Legislative Assembly with a freely elected parliament. Elections, held on May 19, 1992, demonstrated that KDP and PUK were the only parties with a large following.[29] In the leadership elections, Barzani gained 48 percent of the votes, Talabani 45 percent. It was decided to set the results aside and for the two men to lead the Kurdistan Front jointly.

While the Kurdish political parties had devised a practical and democratic system of government and the people, with few exceptions, conducted their elections admirably, it was not easy to set the machinery of the system in place. The predicaments that the "Kurdish Regional Government" faced were many, among them the long-standing fragmentation of the Kurdish community along linguistic and tribal lines as well as divisions of a more recent origin. Before too long the two leaders were involved in a bitter power struggle. Kurdistan Democratic Party of Mas'ud Barzani became Turkey's main ally in the region, a policy opposed at the time by the Talabani faction. The Turkish army and KDP militia conducted joint military campaigns inside Iraq against the separatist Kurds of Turkey, led by members the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), who had taken refuge in Iraq. This led to joint attacks against Barzani territory organized by PKK (Turkey) and PUK (Talabani). Barzani, whose territory lay immediately south of the Turkish border, had no choice but to cooperate with his powerful northern neighbor. Because of the United Nations' U.S.-enforced sanctions on Iraq, Saddam Hussein had imposed sanctions of his own on the Kurdish region since 1991.

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[29] None of the many small parties that ran independently commanded the 7 percent of the votes threshold; the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan Party achieved only 5 percent. KDP and PUK won 45 and 43.6 percent respectively. Most of the small parties joined the KDP. For details, consult McDowall, pp. 380–382. Observers have praised the Kurdish electorate for conducting a major multi-party election peacefully and very few irregularities.

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The embargo restricted essential services and the flow of basic commodities, including fuel, food, and medicines. The lack of an assured source of energy meant limited urban growth, unemployment, and a stagnant economy. These chaotic conditions intensified internecine fighting and undermined even the sorely needed humanitarian aid from the outside, most of which came into Kurdistan via Turkey.[30]

A cease-fire between the Barzani and Talabani factions was finally negotiated with the help of the United States in September of 1998. The agreement made reference to a future federal authority for the Kurds but also noted that the Kurds had no intention of establishing a separatist state. To alleviate the suspicions of all the surrounding governments, especially Turkey, Barzani further confirmed that the Kurds "do not call for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state, nor have Americans encouraged us to do so, at all. We know that this is not a realistic objective and we know the consequences of calling for an independent Kurdish state in this region." The Turkish Deputy Premier Bulent Ecevit noted that Barzani had agreed that "any solution to northern Iraq has to be within the territorial integrity of Iraq."[31]

From the viewpoint of this study, an interesting feature of the Kurdish elections in northern Iraq is the number of parliamentary seats that were allocated to the two main minorities of the region: the Turkomans and the Christians, a decision influenced, undoubtedly, by the U.S. position that the elections be democratic, and that the two non-Kurdish minorities be represented. The only Christian political party of note active in Kurdistan was the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM, or Zo'a—from part of its name in Syriac), founded in 1979. One of the goals of Zo'a has been "to solidify the bases of our national existence in our ancestral homeland" [Assyria].[32] Four of the five seats reserved for the Christians were allotted to Zo'a,

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[30] Lois McHugh, *Kurdish refugee relief and other humanitarian aid issues in Iraq.* Washington, D.C., Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 1991; Alfred B. Prados, *The Kurds in Iraq: status, protection, and prospects.* Washington, D.C, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 1994.

[31] An Associated Press release from Ankara on November 9, 1998, cited on the Internet. In November of 1992 Turkey confirmed with Syria and Iran their joint commitment to uphold the territorial integrity of Iraq. If faced with the disintegration of Iraq, Turkey had raised the question of the annexation of the northern regions of Iraq. See McDowall, p. 384. For details on Turkish claims to the province of Mosul prior to Iraqi independence in 1932, see above, pp. 175ff.

[32] *Zenda, a Weekly Assyrian On-Line Magazine*, vol. 4, issue 28 (November 9, 1998).

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while one seat went to the Kurdistan Christian Unity list which joined the KDP as its surrogate. The Democratic Christians list attached itself to PUK. During the elections, the Kaldo-Ashur Democratic list was a surrogate of the Iraq Communist Party (ICP); since the ICP received only 2.2 percent of the votes in the elections, that entire membership, or parts of it, joined one of the two main parties.

According to a Zo'a press release dated January 2, 1998, "The Assyrian people of Iraq have no conflict with any of the fraternal peoples that constitute the Iraqi people, be they Arab, Kurd, Turkoman, or other ethnic and religious groups. Our people have joined the Iraqi people and the peoples of the whole region in the struggles for peace, democracy and progress . . . In North Iraq, we have joined in all legitimate struggles to bring peace and democracy to the region. . . . We have stayed out of the fratricide between various Kurdish parties."[33] But Zo'a's own statements admit the harsh reality of the situation. "Our [Assyrian] leaders [in Kurdistan]," according to a Zo'a statement, "have been murdered in front of their homes and in the streets, others have been dragged out of police custody and murdered by mobs, churches have been desecrated and the list goes on . . . Kurdish parties that control this region have the responsibility to punish the criminals and move resolutely to stop these crimes against our people. To-date none of the perpetrators of these murders has been brought to justice."[34]

Zo'a, a number of whose members have been executed by the Saddam government, has been rightly praised for its dedicated leadership and the extensive humanitarian and educational services of the party, including the teaching of modern Syriac and the publication of textbooks in all subjects that in the elementary schools are entirely taught in that spoken language. In a highly-charged political atmosphere, Zo'a expectedly also has its critics within the Christian community and its various cultural and political parties, among both Assyrian and non-Assyrian Christians, especially those who do not live in the north. The Assyrian Patriotic Party (Gabba Atranaya Atouraya), which views itself as a political alternative for those Assyrians who have no nationalist agenda, is opposed to the close

[33] See *Zenda*, vol. 3, issue 43 (January 19, 1998).
[34] *Ibid.*

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ties that Zo'a has with the Kurdish constituency and rejects any special status for the Assyrians. It views them as "a representative population of Iraq and must be treated as one."

Opposed to the nationalistic pretenses of Zo'a and other "Assyrian" political organizations are non-Assyrian fellow Christians, such as the Chaldean Catholics, the Syrian Orthodox and Syrian Catholics,who together form the vast majority of the Christians in Iraq.[35] Thus a large majority of the non-"Nestorian" Christians dissociate themselves from the name Assyrian and try assiduously to be neutral.[36] They are caught in a situation that calls for making a choice between two equally undesirable alternatives—to be with the Kurds amongst whom they live in the north, or with the Arabs to the south where large numbers of their brethren live in urban centers. This predicament was aptly illustrated during a recent visit to Kurdistan, made in August of 1998, by the Patriarch of the Chaldean Catholics, Patriarch of Babylon, Mar Raphael I Bedawid. The Prelate, whose residence and ecclesiastical see is in the capital city of Baghdad, addressed a gathering attended by important Kurdish political personages. He referred to himself as a "son of the Kurdistan Region" and asked the Lord to bless all the people "who are working sincerely to reunify the country, an aim that we are all working for." Christians and Kurds, emphasized the Roman Catholic prelate, "are the sons of this land; we have a joint history. I can even say, more than this: We have common blood." The Patriarch concluded his address with blessings on "our lives, families, our country, and our nation," referring to the northern region as "Iraqi Kurdistan."[37]

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[35] See Youssef Courbage, "Christianity and Islam: Demography in the Middle East," in *ISIM Newsletter* (International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, Leiden), 3 (July 1999), p. 26. According to Courbage, Director of Research at the Institut d'Etudes Demographiques, in Paris, the total Iraqi population of the Syriac-speaking Christians—or those whose liturgical language is Syriac—was 570,700 in 1995. Of these, 390,300 were "Chaldean Catholic," 87,700 "Nestorian," 37,200 "Jacobite." and 55,500 "Syrian Catholic"—Names within quotation marks are those used by Courbage.

[36] See, pp. 9n.35, 156–157, 256–257.

[37] From an unauthorized, working translation of the address, printed by the author from the Internat. Barzani diplomatically refers to all the Christians as "Our Christian brothers." One of Barzani's spokesmen recently spoke of the illusions of some of the Assyrian nationalists, undoubtedly referring to their claims to special rights in ancient Assyria.

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Between Western Christendom and Islam

While the Eastern Christians and their Muslim neighbors have a great deal in common, religious differences still set them apart. Members of each faith have their own distinctive religious customs and tradition; they conduct their marriage ceremonies differently, celebrate different feast and holidays, fast and worship differently, and more importantly, what each religious community holds holy is different. Because of the important role that religion plays in the social and political life of the people, religious differences between majority and minority help widen the social distance between them, strengthening their self awareness and sense of ethnic identity, this being true especially among the members of the minority.[38]

Deteriorating relations between the Muslim Middle East and Western powers often strain Eastern Christian-Muslim relations; indeed, throughout the centuries Christians of the Muslim world have suffered from the fact that they professed the religion of the enemy in the West. Native Christians have been identified as friends of the enemy during wartime, be that during the Persian-Byzantine wars of the 5th century, or in mid-twentieth century, when France, Great Britain, and Israel invaded Egypt. (During that 1956 conflict the Muslim population's hostility toward the "Christian" West was at times directed against the Christians of Egypt despite the love and loyalty of the Coptic Christians for their country.) Unfortunately for the indigenous Christians, Muslim Middle East has experienced a very serious confrontation with the West through most of the twentieth century.[39]

The defeat of the Ottoman state early in the century brought about the disintegration of the last great Muslim empire. The Allied victory in 1918 seemed to put an end to any Islamic threat. To prepare the old Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire for eventual independence, British and French rule was established in the newly established Iraq, Transjordan, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon.[40] With the British and French regimes came alien ideas, values, and lifestyles,

[38] See also the author's *Muslim-Christian Relations*, pp. 18–30, 129–132; in the next several paragraphs, the coverage there has been restated with minor revisions.

[39] See pp. 151ff. and *passim*.

[40] British rule in Egypt, as already noted, had started in 1882; French colonization of North Africa took place prior to World War I—Algeria declared part of metropolitan France in the 1830s.

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together with Western systems of government, producing a generation of elites who were not unwilling to Westernize. But in the eyes of the majority, Western presence was foreign and oppressive. It took another World War (1939–1945) before the British and French rule came to an end, but hardly had they departed from the scene, when the Arabs were faced with a new and more permanent enemy in the Jewish state of Israel, created in the midst of the Arab-Muslim world by the departing Western powers, joined by the United States of America. For the entire second half of the twentieth century Israel would symbolize not only Palestinian homelessness but also the powerlessness and humiliation of millions of Arabs and non-Arab Muslims.[41]

The most dramatic sovereign manifestation of Islam came in 1979 with the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, where for over a half century an undeclared war between the Westernizing Pahlavi dynasty and the religious establishment had created a deep chasm between the popular culture of the masses and the Western culture that the Shah and his father imposed. Combined with other factors and grievances of the region, the festering Palestinian problem and the triumph of Islam in Iran, gave rise in the region to an Islamic renewal and a new self-assertiveness. Among those who joined the movement were the young and the educated classes; as leaders of the next generation, they were disillusioned with the ideologies and strategies that had failed to work out a solution for their parents.[42] They longed for something different, but familiar, with native roots; uniting them was their mistrust of the West. Granted, the West sometimes became the scapegoat for their frustrations and inability to face up to their own reality.[43] It is true, nevertheless, that the West had failed to live up to its democratic ideals in

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[41] See Martin Kramer, "The Muslim Middle East in the 21st Century," *ISIM Newsletter* (International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World), 1 (October 1998), p. 15, where the Hebrew University scholar speaks of a continuing Muslim resentment against Israel, a state of five million Jews with strong links to the West, which "has acquired immense military and economic power in the heart of the Muslim world."

[42] See James R. King, "The Theme of Alienation in Contemporary Middle Eastern Literature," *Muslim World*, 68 (April 1978): 111–31. King points out that it would be difficult to name an ideology or strategy of renewal that some Arab theoretician has not proposed during the inter-war years. Tradition, reform, existentialism, secularism, logical positivism—all have competed for the loyalty of the young, and they have failed.

[43] Outside the Middle East, Muslim activists were anti-Russian in Central Asia, and anti-Hindu in South Asia.

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its dealings with the non-European and the non-Christian. The Muslims of the Middle East are convinced—and recent history affords ample ground for their certitude—that they have shown more trust in Western governments and have had greater goodwill toward the West than the West has shown toward them and their religion. They are also convinced that England and France after World War I, and the United States after World War II, have often disregarded Arabic-Islamic sovereignty and dignity, exploited their countries economically, and violated their customs and culture.

The position of the Eastern Christians and, indeed, of the many ethnic minorities in the region, became more untenable when the leadership in the government became more "religious," emphasizing that the state, society, and religion are one.[44] When the Egyptian government amended its constitution and made Islamic law the principal source of legislation, the hierarchy of the Coptic Christian Orthodox church criticized the move, objecting that it would subject the Egyptian Christians to Islamic constraints and place them legally outside the country's society at large.[45] Emphasis on Islam and its traditions tended to make non-Muslims much more visible and consequently much more uncomfortable before the mistrustful eyes of their Muslim compatriots. The tension also led to a crisis of

[44] In his writings and speeches, Ayatollah 'Ruhollah Khomeini has emphasized that "imperialism" deliberately introduced the concept of the separation of church and state into the Muslim world in order to weaken it. The clerics were to be kept out of politics in order to remove from the conduct of affairs, argues Khomeini, the one group that is willing and able to resist Western imperialism. See Daniel Dishon's article "Faith and Politics," *Jerusalem Post* (intl. ed.), Nov. 18–25,1979, pp. 10–11.

[45] President Sadat, associating the internal criticism by the Coptic church leadership with the attacks against his government by Egyptian emigrant groups overseas, made an unprecedented attack on 14 May 1980 on the Egyptian Coptic church leadership, accusing them of slandering the government abroad, and warned the Coptic leaders to cease recruiting Christian support abroad. On 1 July 1980 *al-Ahram* reported that the Coptic church had denounced emigrant Coptic groups in the United States for their "abuse and insults to our country" and had declared that these groups had "nothing to do with us." See *Foreign Broadcasts Information Service* (F.B.I.S.), 5 (15 July 1980): pp. D-2–3. For details on Christian-Muslim communal tensions in Egypt, see Center for the Study of the Modern Arab World (Saint Joseph's University, Beirut), "Tensions in Middle East Society," *CEMAM Reports* (1972–73): 1 no. 1, 7–55. President Sadat's tough new policy of 5 Sept. 1981, of stifling dissent and fighting "sectarian sedition," resulted in the deposition of Pope Shannuda III of the Coptic church. Among the 1536 persons arrested were 150 Copts, including 16 priests and 6 bishops. See *New York Times*, 8 Sept. 1981, and *F.B.I.S.*, 6–10 Sept. 1981.

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identity.[46] "We're afraid of being suffocated," a Jordanian Christian was quoted in the press, referring to the flood of revivalist Islamic sentiment.[47] Thus isolated, the native Christians have felt as strangers in their own land, and have started to seriously reappraise their identity and direction. They have three possible choices open to them: (1) reject the religious nationalism that is sweeping the region and withdraw into their own sectarianism; (2) leave their lands, immigrate to Western countries where pluralistic societies might accept them; or (3) continue seeking a more active coexistence with their Muslim compatriots.[48]

For Christian minorities to opt for the first alternative above, go back to the old order that prevailed prior to World War I—when, as a well-entrenched corporate group, the Christian *millets* were organized around the principles of a common religion, locality, and ethnicity—would be psychologically as well as politically impossible.[49] Their autonomy and communal organization have long been destroyed; the political base upon which their local autonomy had been established, has been eroded by the establishment of centralized nation states. This is especially true of such Christian minorities as the Syrian Orthodox ("Jacobite") and Assyrian ("Nestorian") Christians, granted that they are still held together by religion, which in their case still continues to be the core of communal identity. But their community is now scattered, its cohesion weakened, its geographical base destroyed.[50] It is not surprising, therefore, that many of

[46] In her excellent study of the Jews of Poland, Professor Celia S. Heller points out that it is only in some countries of the West, under the impact of capitalist development and democratic ideology, that the majority does not react to cultural and religious differences with suspicion and hostility. See her *On the Edge of Destruction* (New York: 1977), p. 63.

[47] *New York Times*, Sept. 14–15, 1979. See also Flora Lewis, in *ibid.*, Dec. 31, 1979, where she describes these trends of an Islamic revival as "wrenching" for the region's minorities.

[48] For Christian identification with Arab nationalism and their vigorous efforts to achieve a mutual understanding between Western Christendom and Islam after the the post-World War II, see pp. 235–236.

[49] For the concept of *millet*, see above, pp. 31–32, 43–44, 53.

[50] In recent decades the Syrian Orthodox population of Turkey has left because the violent conflict that has raged between the Turkish army and the Kurds has turned the region into a war zone. The Tur Abdin population, estimated in the 1930s at about 70,000 had dwindled in late 1990s to less than 2,000. Since 1990, entire villages, where for centuries the Christian population had found security, were now abandoned, in search for greater security elsewhere. This time they found it in far-away places like Austria, Germany, Norway, Sweden, New Zealand, Australia and the United States. For details, see Heidi Armbruster, "'We speak the Language

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them, faced with this impossible alternative, find it easier to immigrate to foreign lands. As early as twenty years ago, a report found many Christians emigrating from the Middle East, even from countries such as Jordan, where the late King Hussein had gone out of his way to reassure his Christian subjects that they have a place in his kingdom.[51] Many emigrate, nevertheless, because they feel there is no role for them in a predominantly Muslim society that is beset by acute internal and external conflicts and contradictions, its future likely to be more violent and more threatening before some "irreversible forces" of history hopefully bring about a better day.[52] More often, however, Christians, just as their Muslim compatriots, emigrate because their motivation and education drive them to the West, where a higher standard of living, better employment and greater opportunities for professional advancement have resulted in a "brain-drain" pattern experienced throughout the developing countries.[53] The Greek Orthodox mayor of the Jordanian town of Madaba, an ancient Christian center that is fast becoming Muslim, explained that the Christians "go mostly out of ambition. It has nothing to do with religion . . . [They wish] to find a better life."[54] The departure of the members of a class that usually is well educated results, of course, in a general decline in the level of the community's educa-

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that was spoken by Jesus': Syrian Christian Migrants in Vienna," paper presented at the Middle East Studies Association's 30th Annual Meeting, November 21–24, 1996, Providence, Rhode Island, pp. 20–21.

[51] *New York Times* 14–15 Sept. 1979. The king has been criticized for favoring Christians in high places; others point out that in the past, Christians were often favored because of their education, a fact no longer true. Most probably, the king's reason for choosing Christians was his confidence in their loyalty.

[52] Looking into the future of the Arab world, two Arab scholars at a conference sponsored by Georgetown University's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies spoke of the eventual transformation of Arab society through a "popular movement," and of the triumph of "democratization and secularization of Arab society," to be brought about by "irreversible forces . . . grounded in an objective historical circumstance." See H. Barakat and H. Sharabi, in M.C. Hudson, ed., *The Arab Future* (Washington, D.C., 1979), pp. 79, 101, 104.

[53] The number of Muslim youth who immigrate to Western countries, especially to the United States and Canada, has also greatly increased since World War II. Here many marry "Christian" wives and adapt themselves to the American pattern of life. See Walter Holsten, "The Muslim Presence in the West," *International Review of Missions* 55 (1966): 448–56; Yvonne Y. Haddad, "The Muslim Experience in the United States," *Link* 2, no. 4 (Sept.–Oct. 1979): 1–12; A.B. Zahlan, "The Arab Brain Drain," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin 6*, no. 3 (1 Oct. 1972): 1–16.

[54] *New York Times*, 14 Sept. 1979.

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tion, and leads to an absence of committed leadership among those who remain.

The third alternative—to seek coexistence with Islam and their Muslim compatriots—is the only choice left for the majority of the Eastern Christians. How successful they will be in their search will depend greatly on how successful Middle Eastern leaders and politicians are in their efforts to build a more stable and coherent political order; they have to make greater effort to integrate not only the Christians, but all the various elements of the population. In their own effort to keep in close contact with their Muslim countrymen, and to approach Islam with a new understanding, Middle Eastern Christians have found support and guidance in the new dialogue and ecumenism that Western Christendom is advocating, trying especially to establish a new relationship with Islam, a subject treated in part of the next, concluding, chapter.

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CHAPTER TEN

FROM MISSIONS TO ECUMENISM

The rapidly growing strength of the nationalist movement after World War II period, and the increased cultural resistance to the foreigner that nationalism generated, gave rise to a new set of problems for the missions and indirectly for the native Christians. Ironically, the foreign missionaries themselves had been in some measure responsible for the social, racial, and political unrest which were now sweeping not only through the Middle East but all over Asia and Africa.

The missionaries had a far more profound influence upon the Asians and Africans than the meager number of their converts in the Muslim world would indicate; the benefits conferred by them were of the most vital kind that one people ever could give to another. To them is due the widely acknowledged credit for opening hospitals, schools and colleges—for both men and women. They were also among the foremost in declaring principles of international justice and equality. These consecrated teachers, doctors, nurses, and evangelists brought with them the best elements of their own culture and transmitted them in an atmosphere of high ideals and unselfish service. Their exemplary service became an inspiration to thousands, and graduates of their schools became outstanding leaders and public servants; the American University of Beirut is a shining example of what the missions bequeathed.

But the missionaries had themselves sown seeds of ill will. For a whole century they tried to demonstrate the superiority of their religion to the Muslims, urging them to recognize their errors and accept the Truth that had brought such manifold blessings to the Western world. In other parts of Asia and Africa some of these evangelists were especially intolerant. "Never was so much opposed and destroyed in human history in the name of love," writes an American professor of religion, "and by none other than the only people from the West who had any expressions of love toward the Asian and the African."[1] This insensitivity toward non-Christian religions was

[1] P.H. Ashby, "Re-thinking Missions Again," *Christian Century, 70* (1953), 1167.

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characteristic of a large segment of Protestantism especially until late in the nineteenth century, and as already noted, among a few it continued into the twentieth.

With nationalism from outside and liberalism from within the churches, the missions were eventually compelled to reexamine their position in the Middle East. As early as 1928 some of the assumptions of Western superiority, so characteristic of the nineteenth century missions, were being abandoned in some quarters. The world missionary conference held in Jerusalem in 1928 recommended that the Christian mission in relation to Islam had to be approached in a spirit of greater humility, cognizant of "our share in racial and national antipathies." The conference also recognized "certain spiritual values in the Muslim faith." One of the special difficulties in presenting the Christian message to Muslims was recognized to be "the identification of Christianity in the minds of the Muslims . . . with the political policies and practices of Western governments."[2] In 1931 an unofficial group of laymen of seven Protestant denominations sent a Laymen's Appraisal Commission of fifteen members to study the missionary presence in Asia. The group published their controversial report under the title *Re-thinking Missions.* Among its recommendations, some of which a few missions had already adopted, the Commission advocated the complete reconstruction of the foreign missionary enterprise, in conformity with humanitarian and educational, not evangelical, objectives. It declared that Christians should "look forward to the continued co-existence of other religions with Christianity, each stimulating the other in growth toward the ultimate goal—unity in the completest religious truth."[3] The aim of the missions was declared to be "to seek with people of other lands a true knowledge and love of God, expressing in life and work what we have learned through Jesus Christ, and endeavoring to give effect to his spirit in the life of the world."[4]

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[2] International Missionary Council, *Jerusalem Conference . . . 1928*, vol. i (New York, 1928), p. 329.

[3] *Re-Thinking Missions, the report of the Commission of Appraisal of the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry* (New York, 1932), p. 44.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 59. For details on the controversy created by *Re-Thinking Missions*, consult Gerald H. Anderson, "American Protestants in Pursuit of Mission: 1886–1986," in *Missiology, An Ecumenical Introduction, Texts and Contexts of Global Christianity*, eds. A. Camps, L.A. Hoedemaker, M.R. Sprindler, *et al.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995), pp. 396–400.

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The Report of the Laymen's Commission was rejected by most of the mission boards. "We cannot accept," wrote the General Council of the Presbyterian Church, "the interpretations placed by the [Laymen's] Report upon the Christian message and the missionary objective. What is proposed is virtually a denial of evangelical Christianity . . . Christ is wounded in the house of His friends."[5] In a well-written booklet on missions in the Middle East, the Field Representative of the United Presbyterian Church noted that "the most valuable contribution the Evangelical Christian can make in the Middle East is to help his Church become vigorously missionary and zealously evangelistic."[6] In an article entitled "Abandon Missions to Moslems?" a director of the Protestant International Missionary Council concluded his rebuttal in these words: "Missions to Moslems," he wrote, "may not be large and they may not result in any great churches, but by their very continuation and expressions of love in the midst of misunderstanding and rejection they reflect the mission of their Lord . . . Not in spite of but because of the difficulties they face they represent the glory of the missionary enterprise."[7]

Unfortunately for the missions, their labors among Muslims had not only not resulted "in any great churches" among the Muslims, but in no churches at all. An inquiry into the causes of this "relative sterility" was conducted in the late 1930s by the Near East Christian Council, prompted by a deep concern over the fact that, with certain conspicuous exceptions, work had gone on among Muslims decade after decade without the creation of a true indigenous church, or any considerable number of converts out of which such a church might conceivably be found.[8] The Council inquiry found that there were two special hindrances: (1) As Muslims viewed it, a change of religion was primarily a change of group-communication and group-loyalty, and (2) Christian teaching did not mean the same to the Muslim that it does to the Christian. Veteran missionaries in Muslim lands were beginning to realize that to the Muslim his community was a noble and sacred thing—a socio-political-religious fellowship for which the believer is willing to give his life. When a man stood

[5] A.J. Brown, pp. 101–102.
[6] R. Park Johnson, *The Middle East Pilgrimage* (New York, 1958), p. 147.
[7] C.W. Forman, "Abandon Missions to Moslems?" *Christian Century*, 76 (1959), 130.
[8] *Muslim World*, 31 (1941), 116.

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forth to become a Christian, wrote a discerning missionary, "whether he will or not he usually finds himself separated from his own people and hence from his own religious, moral and cultural background."[9]

At the world missionary conference held at Madras in 1938, another difficulty of the missions in Muslim lands was found to stem from the fact that the indigenous Eastern churches had not taken an active interest in the evangelization of their Muslim neighbors. "Too often [these Eastern] churches seem indifferent to Muslim enquirers, or look upon them with suspicion as to their motive in becoming Christians." The indigenous Christians did find it difficult to be zealous evangelists. Having lived for fourteen centuries under Muslim domination, where proselytism and even preaching were criminal offenses, Eastern Christians had long lost their evangelical zeal. Now, as in the past, Islam, officially or unofficially, remained the religion of the state. Religious freedom, guaranteed by the various constitutions may be taken to mean what religious liberty had always meant in the East: the right to practice the religion in which one is born. Ironically, but for this concept, embodied in the millet system of administration, Christianity in the East would long have disappeared.[10] The only religious conversion allowed was to embrace the dominant religion, Islam.

The native evangelical churches that the missionaries had helped build, were small, most of their membership drawn from the ranks of the older Eastern churches. The only exception to this was Iran, where "about 500 converts from Islam and several hundred Jewish and Zoroastrian converts" were reported as communicants at mid-twentieth century.[11] The Evangelical Church was made up predominantly of former "Nestorians" and Armenian Christians. Until the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran during the Khomeini revolution of 1979, these native Christians, assisted and encouraged by American missionaries, continued to play an important role in the only field in the Middle East where evangelism had found a modest success. But even in Iran, and long before the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the activities of these evangelicals were

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[9] *Missionary Review*, 56 (1933), 178.

[10] For the origins of the millet system, see above, pp. 31–32, 43–44, 53.

[11] W.M. Miller, "Forward in Iran," *World Dominion*, January–February 1951, p. 35.

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severely curtailed. A bill introduced in the Iranian Parliament in 1956 provided death penalty for anyone who in any way taught anything against Islam.

In Egypt, a report of the "Synod of the Nile" noted in 1947 that during that year there had been only five or six converts from Islam to Christianity, while nearly two thousand had embraced Islam from the Coptic Christian minority.[12] Most of these converts to Islam, like their forefathers, changed their religion because of social and economic pressures that weighed upon them as a religious minority; others, with impunity, committed a fraud upon Muslim law and converted to dissolve an unhappy marriage. But the majority renounce Christianity because they want to attain status in a society where religion and status are still two of the most important things in life.[13]

The second half of the twentieth century saw the rapid rise of nationalism and the achievement of independence from colonial rule throughout Asia and Africa. During the 1950s and 1960s more than one hundred new nations come into existence; most of these states would either expel or restrict missionary activity within their borders. The challenge of Communism that followed the enormous increase of Russian power and influence during the early years of the Cold War added to the difficulties facing the missions. By a historical accident the revolutions of nationalism and communism reached their zenith during these post-war years. By then the Communists had well learned how to exploit the goals and grievances of nationalism, taking advantage of Western failure to recognize the appeal of the newly-expressed aspirations of colonized peoples. While the West easily refuted the materialistic philosophy of "godless" Communism, the latter condemned even more severely the practical atheism of the "Christian" West and its exploitation of the underdeveloped areas of the world. In Iran the Communists attacked the missionaries as agents of imperialism; they printed the Beatitudes in full and explained how Christian evangelists, representatives of foreign nations, were trying to make Iranians "poor" and "meak" and

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[12] *Muslim World*, 37 (1947), 314.

[13] One is reminded of a remark attributed to the ninth-century Caliph al-Ma'mun. He is reported to have made the observation that his courtiers "belong to a class who embraced Islam, not from any love of this religion, but [from the desire] to gain access to my court and share in the honor, wealth and power of the Realm; they have no inner persuasion of that which they outwardly profess." W. Muir, *The Apology of Al Kindy* (London, 1882), p. xii.

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"long-suffering" in order to dominate their country.[14] Thus opposition came not only from the fundamentalist Muslims but also from the irreligious, among whom were many Eastern Christians, who became devotees of leftist organizations that preached equality of all ethnic and social groups.[15]

Living under systems that combine the political and religious, Muslim nationalists did not find it difficult to see in the Christian missionary zeal a part of that imperialist arrogance to which they were becoming particularly sensitive; they soon directed their antagonism for the West toward the Christian evangelists, particularly the Protestants. During a period of intense political struggle for independence, missionary statements in reference to Islam, read and published in newspapers, were taken up by the nationalists as attacks on their community and national loyalties; they served as "a challenge," writes H.G. Dorman, "taken up with enthusiasm, sometimes by men of no particular religious interest or spiritual experience, because it represented an attack upon many beloved elements in Muslim culture that are respected as the source of all that is good and noble in national life."[16] Many of the politically conscious were convinced that the missionaries, and the native Christians among whom they worked, were used as instruments by foreign powers in a policy of dividing and weakening the nationalist movement. In a book published in Beirut in 1953 and revised in 1957, two Arab intellectuals considered the missionary movement even more harmful than imperialism to the Arab countries, since imperialism "did not come to our country except from behind the missionary curtain."[17] The influence of the mission schools had been not only devisive but actually had delayed the development of Arab nationalism. The authors tried to prove their point by quoting "the books of the missionaries themselves"; looking back, they saw something inauspicious in the calling of the first Protestant church built in the Ottoman

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[14] W.M. Miller, "The Religious Situation in Iran," *Muslim World*, 41 (1951), 81.

[15] H.G. Dorman, *Toward Understanding Islam* (New York, 1948), p. 117.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] 'Umar Farrūkh and Muṣṭafa Khālidi, *al-Tabshīr wa-al-Isti'mār fi al-Bilād al-'Arabīyah*, 2nd ed. (Beirut, 1957), p. 7. The book bears a cover-title in English: *Missionaries and Imperialism, being an account of mission work in the Arab World as a medium of cultural expansion and preparation for political interventions.* Of the two authors, the former was a member of the Arab Academy of Damascus, the latter the Director of the National School of Nursing in Beirut and a former Associate Professor of gynecology and obstetrics at the American University of Beirut.

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Empire "The Church of Zion." The case of the Assyrians in Iraq was likened to that of the Zionists in Palestine and the missionaries were accused of "fabricating" the Assyrian question. In a chapter entitled "Foreign Administrations [Mandates] in the Service of Missions," the authors spoke of the Assyrian "sedition," one of many that were perpetrated by the imperialists in the name of religion.[18]

A law issued at the Presidency of the United Arab Republic of Egypt in 1958, decreed that "No school should teach pupils any religion other than their own, or make them participate in observing any religious rites other than their own even if their guardians agree" (Article xvii.). The law required that no book be used that "contradicts the national spirit, public order or morality or touches religions or creeds" (Article xx).[19] In Iraq, all but four of the more than fifty Protestant missionaries, mostly Americans, were asked to leave the country during the first half of 1959, the year after the pro-Western monarchy was overthrown. This was done at a time when the new regime's policy of extending equality to the various segments of the population, placed the ancient indigenous Christians of the land, mostly Catholic Chaldeans, "Nestorians," and "Jacobites," in a relatively favorable position.[20]

These events of the post-World War II period helped shape the emerging new image that the indigenous Christians of the Middle East were developing of themselves. Deprived after that war of the false security which they had felt in the political and religious presence of Westerners in generations past, native Christians began to see more clearly the necessity of cooperation with their Muslim neighbors and countrymen. Leaders of thought on both the Muslim and Christian side realized that Western presence during the pre-World War II years had hindered interfaith collaboration, which alone could ensure security for the region. Even the Assyrian community, which especially felt insecure as a result of its turbulent recent history, began to reconcile itself psychologically to its new "citizenship." Mar Shamun, who as late as 1945 had submitted an "Assyrian National Petition" to the newly organized United Nations meeting in San Francisco, was advising his people in 1948 to "live as loyal

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[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 159–161, 174–175. For the creation of Israel as an issue in Christian-Muslim relations, see this author's *Muslim-Christian Relations*, pp. 123ff.

[19] Law no. 160 of 1958, text in the U.A.R. *Official Journal*, Special Issue no. 29, September 25, 1958.

[20] N. Makdisi, "Impact of Iraqi Revolt," *Christian Century*, 76 (1959), 708–709.

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subjects and citizens of the various countries, contributing their best as peace-loving Christian citizens, and receiving in return justice, freedom and equality of opportunities, from their respective governments."[21] Among the Christian Arabs especially, the importance of cooperation with their Muslim compatriots became the theme emphasized most by both lay and clerical leadership as they tried to evaluate their role in a predominantly Muslim society. Christians were told that they could not keep to themselves; they had to work toward the solution of economic and social problems that their newly independent nation faced; they had to gain the trust of their Muslim countrymen.

The international decisions reached after the Second World War with regard to minority status also helped to create a more favorable atmosphere for intergroup relations in the Middle East. These decisions were inspired by a philosophy characterized by the universal protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Instead of concerning itself with minority problems as such, as the League of Nations had done, the Commission on Human Rights of the United Nations concluded "not to deal in a specific provision with the question of minorities" because of its "complexity."[22] Middle Eastern nation states, free members of the world organization now, sided with the majority and spoke of their unfortunate experience with regard to minority guarantees. The Syrian delegate pointed out that the principle of the protection of minorities "had often been used as a political excuse to interfere with the domestic affairs of other countries"; if it were incorporated in the Declaration of Human Rights, he noted, "some nations would feel justified in abusing [it]." Moreover, the proposals were not acceptable because they were "based on the assumption that Governments . . . would not treat their citizens alike."[23] In reply to a questionnaire of the United Nations, all the Middle Eastern governments that answered, denied

[21] See Coakley, *Bulletin*, p. 189.

[22] United Nations, Third Committee, Resolution 21, September–December 1948; *Official Record of the Third Session of the General Assembly*, p. 726. When the United Nations Organization was established in 1945, among its charter members were only nine countries from Asia, including the Islamic countries of the Middle East—only China, India and the Philippines from outside the Middle East—and four countries from Africa, one of them white-dominated South Africa, the other three being Egypt, Ethiopia, and Liberia. At the time of writing, there are 39 member countries from Asia and 44 from Africa.

[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 729, 737–738.

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the existence of any racial or national discrimination; in some cases this denial was supported by quotations from constitutions or other legal texts.[24]

The United Nations proposals, by reason of their universal application and noncompulsory nature, were hoped to engender a more cooperative attitude on the part of states that signified their willingness to adhere to the Declaration of Human Rights. At the same time the new procedure would hopefully remove the incentive to groups seeking to maintain their characteristics solely in order to claim, as national minorities, benefits of international or foreign protection. Under the League of Nations system, which admittedly gave the minorities a greater measure of civil and political rights, "protection" of any kind had only hardened the resistance of the minorities, while their leaders, for the enforcement of their rights, sought help from outside their own states. Such circumstances were bound to produce a severe psychological strain on the relations between the minority and majority and, as clearly demonstrated in this study, they often led to retaliation. Indeed, the concern of the League of Nations for the Middle Eastern minorities is in certain respects reminiscent of the nineteenth-century ill-advised expressions of sympathy which merely excited the suspicions of the Ottomans to the more active persecution of those whom they regarded as friends of their enemies. Regrettably, during the inter-war period, the early international "guarantees" of the League of Nations were taken as a substitute for the duties and responsibilities that the mandatory powers ought to have discharged themselves.[25]

Following World War II, Middle East governments were encouraged to do away, at least legally, with all minority barriers other than those essentially religious. Outside Egypt and Turkey, efforts to standardize the law did not influence the traditional Christian courts to any extent. In Iraq, government efforts to codify Shari'ah law and to unify even the Muslim religious courts failed because of opposition from the conservative elements of the country, both Sunni and Shiah.[26] On the other hand, the Syrian law of Personal Status of

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[24] United Nations, Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, *Information from Governments Relating to the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities; Lebanon; Kingdom of Hashimite Jordan; Pakistan; Saudi Arabia; Yaman; Afghanistan; Egypt* (document E/CN.$_4$/Sub.2/122 Add.$_5$ dated January 16, 1951).

[25] For a discussion of these guarantees, see above, pp. 151–153.

[26] In 1955 attempts by the government of India to develop a uniform civil code

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1953 succeeded in attaining a uniform code for the Muslims; it excepted only the Druze, Christian, and Jewish communities, whose members continued to be governed by their own canonical laws.[27] Within the general framework of the religious law, statutes were passed concerning the organization and procedure of the non-Muslim religious courts. In Iraq a law of 1947 that regulated the religious courts of Christians and Jews, gave the Minister of Justice the "right of complete supervision" over all religious courts and benches of revision; the Minister "may depute one of the judges or judicial inspectors to inspect them."[28] The law required the religious head of each sect to be of Iraqi nationality who, if "of good conduct," and if appointed to his office by a special government decree, will be the first choice of the Ministry of Justice for the presidency of the bench of revision of his church's court.

From the Iraqi government's viewpoint, the above restrictions disqualified the prelate of the Church of the East ("Nestorian"), then in exile, for the office of Patriarch. While the Church itself enjoyed most of the privileges granted to the other religious bodies, it was not considered as one of the officially recognized Christian congregations in the land. Soon after the overthrow of the monarchy in 1958, the Prime Minister of the Republic attended ceremonies dedicating a newly built Church of the East in the capital. With the passage of time, these modern Assyrians were recognized as part of the local population in both Iraq and Syria.[29]

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including aspects of Muslim personal law were strongly protested by the Muslim minority there.

[27] J.N.D. Anderson, "A Draft Code of Personal Law for Iraq," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 15 (Part 1, 1953), 43–44; *idem*, "The Syrian Law of Personal Status," *ibid.*, 17 (Part 1, 1955), 34, 49. See also Z.E. Jwaideh, "The New Civil Code of Iraq," *The George Washington Law Review*, 22 (1953), 181–182.

[28] See Iraq, Ministry of Justice, Law no. 32 of 1947 "regulating the religious courts of the Christian and Jewish sects," in *Waqāyiʿ al-ʿIrāqīyah* (1947), no. 2509; "Law of Procedure no. 10 of 1950 for the Christian and Jewish sects," in *Iraq Government Gazette*, May 5, 1951, pp. 158–186; Kāmil al-Sāmarrāʾi, *Majmūʿat al-Qawānīn al-Khāṣṣah bi-al-Ṭawāʾif al-Masīḥīyah wa-al-Mūsawīyah wa-al-Anzimah wa-al-Bayānāi wa-al-Taʿlīmāt al-Ṣādirah bi-Mūjibiha* (Baghdad, 1951); Muḥammad Aḥmad al-ʿUmar, *al-Aḥwāl al-Shakhsīyah wa-al-Taṭbīqat al-Sharʿīyah wa-Sukukuha* (Baghdad, n.d.). For Syrian and Lebanese laws pertaining to non-Muslim religious courts, see Lebanon, Ministry of Justice, *op. cit.*, I, 82, 87, under section entitled al-Aḥwal al-Shakhsīyah; *al-Jarīdat al-Rasmīyah li-al-Jūmhūrīyat al-Sūrīyah*, no. 63 (October 8, 1953), 4.

[29] The Iraqi government has rejected the term Assyrian as a historically valid name for this religious minority. See above, pp. 19–20.

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In Syria, the refugee status of the community was abolished in 1941, when its members were granted Syrian citizenship. Unlike their brethren in Iraq, half of whom lived in the four major cities of the country, those in Syria were grouped in a number of villages according to their tribal origin. After World War II they prospered as a result of the successful cultivation of cotton on land of which they were the proprietors. Their material security had a desirable psychological and political influence.[30] The community in Iraq sighed with relief when the infamous Iraq Levies were finally disbanded (May 2, 1955), and the Baghdad Pact superseded the controversial Anglo-Iraqi treaty of 1930.[31] As a gesture of loyalty to Iraq, most of the Assyrian Levies and their officers joined the Iraqi army when they were asked by the Iraqi government to do so.

"Re-Thinking Missions Again"[32]

It was becoming increasingly clear to the ecumenical leaders of the "mainline" Protestant churches of the West, that the new Third World would no longer tolerate the old evangelical approach. In some quarters, the very name "missionary" was being abandoned in favor of "fraternal worker." The Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions became the Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations; the Evangelical Church of Egypt was no longer part of "the mother church in North America" but a segment of the Church of Christ the world over.[33] Significant shifts were also taking place among

[30] For details on the establishment of the Assyrian and other Christian refugees in the Syrian region of al-Jazirah, see above, pp. 199–205.

[31] For a discussion of the "Assyrian Levies," see above, pp. 164f.

[32] See also above, pp. 229f.

[33] Referred to as Mainline Churches, these liberal congregations, writes V. David Garrison, belonged to a tradition that was much influenced by the thought currents of Western Europe. In the United States, all the presidents of the country came from these churches, which until recently held influence over the most prestigious American private colleges and universities. See his "A New Epoch in Christian Missions: Global changes since World War II" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1988), pp. 10, 12. For the beginnings of the nineteenth-century Protestant evangelism, see above, pp. 65ff. For details on the ecumenical and evangelical traditions, see William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, Harvard Univ. Press, 1976); George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture, the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelism*, 1870–1925 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980).

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Christian scholars and theologians, both Protestant and Catholic, as they re-examined the "exclusivist" view of the Church, which rested on the conviction, held through the centuries, that God's divine plan centered in Jesus Christ—that he alone provided mankind the way to salvation. A few academics and theologians moved towards a recognition of the validity of other faiths, taking the position that no one religion is to be seen as the fulfillment of other belief systems.[34] While some theologians-scholars advocated "pluralism" and moved away from the centrality of Christ, others affirmed that no faith need sacrifice its basic tenets and traditions when its adherents enter into a dialogue with followers of other faiths and religious traditions. "Dialogue" would be an end in itself, an openness that would not be prejudgmental; it is, to paraphrase David Lockhead, simply a restatement in secular terms of the injunction of neighborly love.[35] Moreover, the missionary establishment of the Christian churches, whether Protestant or Catholic, could not become the mouthpiece of any partisan view, especially one that might undercut the distinctive mission of the Church to proclaim its Good News.[36] Nonetheless, the old missionary order, challenged by post-World War II events and developments, was gradually replaced by three major and distinct traditions: The Ecumenical Protestant, the Ecumenical Roman Catholic and the Evangelical Fundamentalist. The theologies of the three movements ranged from radical Liberation Theology on the left to the "speaking by tongues" of the Charismatics and Pentecostals on the right.[37]

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[34] See Miikka Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions, According to the Second Vatican Council* (Leiden, 1992), p. 144, where he speaks of "a legion of individual Catholic authors who recognize non-Christian religions as ways of divine revelation and salvation," even though the Church does not make "the least compromise in respect of the Catholic faith." Consult also Charles Kimball, *Striving Together, a Way Forward in Christian-Muslim Relations* (Maryknoll, NY, 1991), p. 70. For details on Christian relations with other faiths, see John B. Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia, 1982); Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward World Religious Pluralism: Patterns in Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY, 1982); Garvin d'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (London, 1986); John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY, 1990); Gavin D'Costa, ed. *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered, The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY, 1990).

[35] David Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter* (Maryknoll, NY, 1988), *passim.*

[36] *Re-Thinking Missions*, pp. 159–161, 174–175.

[37] For details on these historic changes, see Garrison, *passim.*

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In 1948, leaders of the mainline churches were able to guide the ecumenical movement of the pre-war years, toward the creation of the World Council of Churches (WCC), with head-quarters in Geneva. When the first assembly of the Council commenced in Amsterdam in 1948, it comprised 145 church bodies. By 1961, when the Orthodox churches became members, the number had swollen to just under 200. Also in 1961, the International Missionary Council merged with WCC, creating its Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. The merger, it was hoped, would reduce denominational rivalry in the missionary field, prevent duplication of effort, and develop more effective programs and methods of apostolic work. By mid-1990s, the Council had a membership of about 330 denominations from more than 100 nations, a truly worldwide organization of Christian churches, keenly aware of the radical change in the world situation.

The World Council of Churches defined itself as "a fellowship of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior." In 1961, when the Orthodox Churches joined the Council, this definition was expanded to "A fellowship of Churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the Scripture and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." It was thus not easy for ecumenism to find the way even though WCC continued to struggle with the formulation of a theology that takes into consideration the religious plurality of the world.[38]

At a General Assembly of the World Council held in Vancouver in 1983, the theological significance of other religious traditions became an especially controversial issue. A report presented on the floor of the Assembly, recognizing the work of God in the lives of people of non-Christian faiths, "was hotly contested." The issue was resolved when the delegates settled for a recognition of "God's creative work in the seeking for religious truth among people of other faiths."[39] In 1991, the Seventh WCC Assembly, held in Canberra, Australia, had as its theme the "Holy Spirit," the third person of the Trinity taking the form of a prayer: "Come Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation." A clash between the traditional and the end-of-the-twentieth-century theologians was inevitable when a 34-years old South Korean, an

[38] See Kimball, p. 81.

[39] Diana L. Eck, "On Seeking and Finding in the World's Religions," *Christian Century*, 107 (May 2, 1990), 454.

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American-educated Presbyterian, invited her listeners in her keynote presentation to take their shoes off "to honor the spirits of Australia's aboriginal people." She explained her views of the Holy Spirit by referring to gods and spirits of her own native land, calling on her listeners "to renounce Western human-centered theological assumptions." While some delegates were ecstatic over the young speaker's unconventional theology, others "found it an alarming example of syncretism."[40]

It should be noted that statements on various subjects issued by the World Council of Churches are not binding on the member bodies. The Council, through its various commissions and their committees, serves as an organized means for its members to work together, be it in service projects, in meeting together for deeper fellowship and mutual understanding, or in presenting a more united witness in preaching the gospel. The Council continues to be active in promoting dialogue between Christian and Muslim groups; through workshops and conferences it has brought members of the two faiths together to open the way for the two religions to meet and ask questions concerning their common ground as well as what is distinctive to each belief. But the Council has found it difficult to face the question of Islam squarely due to the considerable disagreement among its over 300 member communions.[41] The centralized Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, has found it easier to come to a more open decision on its relations with other faiths. Its position on witness was best summed up by Msgr. Pietro Rossano when he served as head of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions. He reduced the Church's new post-Vatican Council II position to two words: Proclamation and Dialogue: (1) Proclamation of the marvelous deeds of God in history—which culminate in the death and resur-

[40] In a joint paper the Orthodox delegation warned against substituting "a private spirit, the spirit of the world or other spirits for the Holy Spirit," affirming a position that the Orthodox representatives at the World Council have repeatedly taken, emphasizing that the basis of unity among Christians is the primitive apostolic faith from which their churches have never departed. For a discussion of the politics of diversity at the World Council of Churches, see Jean Caffey Lyles, "The Limits and Politics of Diversity in the WCC," *The Christian Century*, 108 (March 20, 1991), 316–318; *idem*, "Moves of the Spirit: Diversity of Syncretism," in *ibid.*, 108 (March 13, 1991), 284–286.

[41] See World Council of Churches, *Dialogue with People of Living Faiths, Religion and Society, Report of the Christian-Muslim Colloquium held at Kolymbari, Crete, 27 September–1 October 1987*; David Kerr, "Commercium in Spiritualibis," *Missiology*, 11, no. 2 (1983), 155–167.

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rection of Christ—to all peoples and nations; this is "the very reason for the Church's existence;" and (2). That those who proclaim the good news should know the persons to whom they speak and respect them in their cultural and religious identity. Dialogue with members of other faiths, said Msgr. Rossano, means listening to them in depth, "to let oneself be judged by the other and to understand the other's objections toward ourselves."[42]

The Roman Catholic Church and Islam

By mid-twentieth century the Roman Catholic Church had a membership that was overwhelmingly from outside Europe and North America. Toward the end of the century, that membership had risen to almost 60% of of the world's total Catholic population of almost half a billion faithful. The Church's efforts toward mission and spiritual renewal reached their peak in the Vatican Council II (1962–1965), the ecumenical council convened by Pope John XXIII. In harmony with the ecumenical movement, Vatican II not only widened the scope of the church in its relations with the various Christian churches[43] but also defined its position with the non-Christian faiths of the world.

The Church met the issue of Islam head on. In the declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions, *Nostra aetate* (October 28, 1965), the Church divided non-Christian religions into four groups. In each of these groupings the various faiths are seen in terms of their specific relationship to the church. Accordingly, Judaism and Islam, because of their concept of a personal monotheism, were ranked higher than other religions. First comes Judaism, the faith that historically and theologically has the most intimate association with Christianity. *Nostra aetate* declaration notes "the common spiritual heritage of the Jews and Christians" and "expresses belief in the reconciliation and unification of Jews and Christians into one people of God as a part of the eschatological hope of the Church." In the dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*

[42] Pietro Rossano, "Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism in Roman Catholic Perspective," in *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism*, eds. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (Maryknoll, NY, 1981), pp. 106–107.

[43] One of the striking innovations of the Council was to invite Protestants and Orthodox churches to send observers to its meetings.

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(November 21, 1964), the Jews are referred to as "the people from whom Christ was born according to the Flesh."[44]

After Judaism, came Islam, the next closest to Christianity. *Lumen gentium* notes that "the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Moslems." They "profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day." Although Allah is not mentioned by name, it is only another name of the same true God whom the Christians address in their prayers; Allah is the one true God and not a god.[45] *Nostra aetate* goes on to recognizes affinity between Islam and Christianity at several points, emphasizing that the two faiths hold a number of beliefs in common, a Church position that was diametrically different from the earlier teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. "Many Christians," wrote the editors of the Vatican II Documents, "have thought of Moslems as fanatical followers of a religion of power and ignorance and sexually excessive."[46] Emphasizing only the positive,[47] the Church now told the faithful that, like them, Muslims, "adore one God, living and enduring, merciful and all powerful." Although Muslims do not "acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet." They also "honor Mary, His Virgin mother; at all times they call on her . . . with devotion . . . they prize the moral life, and give worship to God [through] prayer, almsgiving and fasting."[48]

The Council went beyond mere gestures; a special commission was formed in the summer of 1964 to study relations between the

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[44] Ruokanen, p. 140. See also Rossano, pp. 107–108.

[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 75–76, 78.

[46] Walter M. Abbott and Joseph Gallagher, trans. and eds., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York, 1966), p. 663, n. 13. See also Ruokanen, pp. 88, 75–79; 140–144, and Rossano, *loc. cit.*

[47] Notably, *Nostra aetate*, which stresses the high regard that the Catholic Church has for the Muslims, does not mention the highly revered Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, by name; but neither does the declaration direct attention to Islam's explicit rejections in the Qur'an of some of the basic tenets of Christianity. Cf. Ruokanen, pp. 75 seq. For details on Islam's views of Christian beliefs, see above, pp. 45ff.

[48] Consult Fr. Julius Basetti-Sani, "For a Dialogue between Christians and Muslims," *Muslim World*, 57 (1967), 186–196. In 1979, when Pope John Paul II visited Turkey, he called upon Muslims to examine their common roots with Christians—their reverence for Jesus as prophet, and for the Virgin Mary and their belief in one God; the pontiff spoke of the two faiths together embarking on a crusade against the evils of the consumer society and for "moral values, peace and liberty." See *Lancaster New Era* (Lancaster, PA, December 4, 1979).

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Church and Islam. The special commission, which consists of representatives from the Congregations for the Eastern churches,[49] was to be a separate department within the Vatican's administrative system, unconnected with its Secretariat for non-Christians, which included the religions of Africa and Asia.[50]

This historic recognition of Islam by the Roman Catholic Church has hopefully removed one of the major causes of estrangement between the two religions. Muslims have for centuries resented the fact that while they acknowledge Christianity as a divinely inspired religion, Christianity has persistently refused to acknowledge the divine origin of their faith.[51] Addressing itself to both Christians and Muslims, *Nostra aetate* declaration pleads that followers of both faiths forget the "many quarrels and dissentions" of past centuries and to make a sincere effort to achieve mutual understanding, and jointly "to preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values."[52]

Historically, the chief goal of the Roman Catholic Church in the Muslim Middle East, after the Crusading wars of the late Middle Ages, has been to win the "heretical" Christians there back to the

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[49] In their new role, noted above, Eastern Christian leaders have worked vigorously in the World Council of Churches, the Middle East Council of Churches, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, to achieve a mutual understanding between Western Christendom and Islam. A number of prominent leaders of the Eastern Catholic churches have been active in this endeavor, among them former "Nestorians" and "Jacobites," bishops and patriarchs such as Cheikho, Tabbuni, Maximos IV, Medawar, Edelby and others; they have worked within the Church with a host of European priests-scholars who had lived and labored in the Muslim world. For details see the author's *Muslim-Christian Relations, passim.*

[50] Islam falls into a category different from other non-Christian religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. While Muslims honor and worship the one true God, "those who follow Hinduism or Buddhism still are seekers of God, 'exploring' the truth and seeking to answer the deepest questions of human existence." All the rest of world religions fall into the fourth category; they attempt "in their own ways to calm the hearts of men by outlining a program of life covering doctrine, moral precepts, and sacred rites." In the words of the dogmatic constitution of the Church, Lumen gentium on the faiths of the fourth rank, God is not remote "from those who in shadows and images seek the the unknown God." For details see Ruokanen, p. 141.

[51] Nabih A. Faris, "The Muslim Thinker and His Christian Relation," *Muslim World*, 47 (1957), 623.

[52] Cited in Ruokanen, p. 88. For the positive response of the Muslims to Vatican Council II's declarations on Islam, see Alex Zanotelli, "Islam: Too soon for a Dialogue?" *World Mission*, 17 (Fall, 1966), 94. Introducing Cardinal Franziskus Koenig of Vienna to an audience at al-Azhar University, where he delivered a lecture on the monotheistic religions, the rector of the university had asked Muslims to be "as charitable as the Christians are and let us unite with them to work for the good of humanity." See also *Mélanges Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientalis du Caire*, 8 (1964–66), 407–422.

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"Mother Church" and to reestablish union with them, rather than to proselytize among Muslims.[53] In its objective to win back the Eastern Churches into the Union, the Roman Catholic Church has for centuries labored with a consistency and persistence not found among other denominations. During the post-Vatican Council II period, the opportunity to invite the Assyrian Church of the East to enter the "Union," came in the 1990s. Before we cover those relations, however, it is important that we backtrack and briefly note the momentous developments that had taken place within the Church of the East during the few earlier decades.

Church of the East Isolated, Leaderless

The post-World War II period found the Church of the East crying out for leadership.[54] Its Patriarch, Mar Eshai Shamun, had been living in exile since the early 1930s.[55] In 1940 he was invited by the American Assyrians to make his home among them. He accepted and for years established his residence in Chicago and later in San Francisco. The Assyrian communities in America, whose origins go back to the late nineteenth century, began to increase and prosper after World War II; church membership in 1952 was estimated at 3,200 with ten churches in seven states: Yonkers (New York), New Brittain (Connecticut), Flint (Michigan), Philadelphia (Pennsylvania), Gary (Indiana), Chicago (Illinois), San Francisco and Turlock (California).[56] In the Middle East the absence of the Patriarch from their midst was beginning to alienate the faithful.[57] The affairs of

[53] If there is any hope that the Church and Islam might reach "some kind of understanding and cooperation regarding proper religious truth," according to Ruokanen, the Vatican Council found it to be "in the sphere of natural and moral law." *Ibid.* On the Catholic Church's position on witness to non-Christian religions, see above, p. 245n.50.

[54] For information on some of the recent internal affairs of the Church of the East, the author is especially indebted to Mar Seraphim's "Sidelights on Assyrian Church History," *The Glastonbury Bulletin*, No. 63 (January 1982), 91–102, and J.F. Coakley's "The Church of the East since 1914," *Bulletin*, pp. 179–198.

[55] See above, pp. 192–194.

[56] Mar Seraphim, p. 95. The membership of the Church in America was estimated by the Church hierarchy in 1995 to be roughly 100,000, with a total worldwide population of 420,000. See Coakley, *Bulletin*, p. 198.

[57] In an effort at reconciliation and with the hope that he would be allowed to return to his people, Mar Shamun had contacted the Iraqi embassy in Washington in 1948; there he submitted "his loyal homage" to the authorities. After his peti-

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the Church there seemed to be neglected; its scattered congregations needed better-schooled priests and more qualified bishops. A number of bishoprical offices, vacated by death and other misfortunes, could not be filled for lack of qualified candidates. The office of the Metropolitan of India, which from 1928 till his death in 1945, was shepherded by the highly regarded Mar Timotheus, lay vacant for seven years before Mar Shamun elevated Pastor Mansur Darmo to that office in 1952, under the name of Mar Thoma Darmo.[58]

Mar Shamun worked hard for his church and people and as best as he could. Among the reforms that he introduced was the adoption of the Latin Easter and the introduction of the Gregorian calendar. The new calendar enabled the Church of the East and the churches of the West to celebrate Christmas on the same day, a move that was well-received by most by congregations in the West. Among a few in the Middle East, the new calendar became the immediate cause of a revolt against the Patriarch. He was accused of yielding to Western, modernist trends; the dissenters were soon joined by other anti-Mar Shamun parties and personalities, some of whom had for long personally disliked the prelate.[59] The issue that fueled these divisions further was that of hereditary succession, a topic that had been recently raised when an article that had originally appeared in the *Church Times* in 1955, in England, was resurrected in 1960.[60] The article raised the possibility that the Patriarch would be succeeded by yet another member of the Mar Shamun family.[61]

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tion was rejected he applied for and received United States citizenship in 1949. See Seraphim, *loc. cit.*

[58] For details on the Church of the East in India, see the author's *Muslim-Christian Relations*, pp. 139f.

[59] See above pp. 192–194.

[60] According to Mar Seraphim, Canon J.A. Douglas, author of the article, had "speculated" on patriarchal succession when in 1955 Mar Shamun was in London for the christening of a niece; his presence there had indicated his intention that had the child been a boy, Mar Shamun would have declared him his heir. See Mar Seraphim, *op. cit.*, p. 96. See also *ibid.*, No. 65 (November 1982), pp. 156–157, where Rowena d'Mar Shimun, a sister of the Patriarch, strongly denies that Mar Shamun, or the Patriarchal family was interested in hereditary succession. Just before his death in 1920, "Mar Polos Shimun XXII," she wrote, "told the family not to let the people make anyone from our family Patriarch." After his death, "When the Assyrian chiefs came to choose the new patriarch they were begged to choose from another family . . . [Our] family had had enough of being the Patriarchal family." As for the speculation of Canon Douglas, she wrote, "neither he [Mar Shamun] nor the family would have let it happen." See also Coakley, *Bulletin*, p. 192.

[61] For more on hereditary succession, see above, pp. 55ff.

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The man who emerged as the center of opposition to the Patriarch was Mar Thoma Darmo, Metropolitan of India, a man strongly opposed to hereditary succession because it was uncanonical. When the *Church Times* article came to Mar Darmo's attention, he wrote a letter condemning the hereditary system and had a copy of his epistle forwarded to Mar Shamun.[62] Relations between the Patriarch and the Metropolitan deteriorated when the former tried "to appoint an Advisory Board for the Indian Church comprised of persons known to be hostile to Mar Darmo." The Metropolitan reacted by publishing a pamphlet in 1963: *The Church of the East and Hereditary Succession.* This soon led, early in 1964, to the suspension of the Metropolitan by the Patriarch, a move that led to a division in the Indian Church and from there it spread throughout the Church.[63]

These dissensions erupted into a politico-religious schism in 1968 when the government in Baghdad allowed Mar Darmo to visit Iraq. Soon after his arrival there, in September, he began to consecrate bishops, elevating two of them to the rank of metropolitan—Mar Aprim, an Indian from Kerala, for India, and Mar Addai for Baghdad. In October, the two archbishops joined Mar Darmo and in a "synod" they deposed Mar Shamun himself. Then the two newly-consecrated metropolitans consecrated Mar Darmo as patriarch; the solemnities took place in the Mar Zayya church in Baghdad with some high Iraqi government officials in attendance. Unfortunately for the rival patriarch, he died about a year after his elevation. Elected to succeed him was his Metropolitan of Baghdad, Mar Addai. At the time of this writing (1999), Mar Addai II is still Patriarch of the Ancient Church of the East.

The official favor of the Iraqi government toward the schismatics did not last long, especially after it was realized that they represented a small majority. Mar Shamun, who had been denounced by the Iraqi government in the fall of 1968, was invited by the Iraqi president in late 1969 to write a letter to the Assyrians of the country calling for their loyalty to the Iraqi state. The patriarch complied; his letter was published in the Iraqi press in February 1970.

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[62] Mar Aprem, *Mar Darmo: A Biography* (Trichur, 1974), pp. 55–57, cited by Mar Seraphim, *loc. cit.*

[63] It should be noted that the patriarch and his supporters were not advocates of hereditary succession, but they strongly suspected the dissidents of wanting "nothing less than the deposition of the Patriarch so that he could be replaced by their own candidate." See Seraphim, p. 96.

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The government annulled the order that had given the Mar Darmo faction certain churches. In the spring of that year, after an exile of thirty-seven years, Mar Shamun was welcomed as a guest, recognized officially by the government as the head of the Assyrian community in Iraq.[64] In a sermon that the Patriarch preached on the state-controlled television, he denounced his opponents and spoke in praise of the good life that Christians had historically enjoyed under Islam. He visited Iraq again in 1971, prompting some members of the community to urge him to return permanently. But this was not to be; for personal and historical reasons Mar Shamun had come to the decision in late 1972 not to continue in office. On January 1, 1973 he announced that he was resigning the patriarchate and requested that a successor be elected.[65]

Caught in a major ecclesiastical quandary, the bishops loyal to Mar Shamun petitioned him to resume the duties and administration of the Church while they tried to resolve the problems that faced them and the community.[66] It was agreed that he would stay in office for six months. At the end of the waiting period, with the problem still unresolved, the celibate, sixty-four years old Patriarch revealed in a letter of August 18, 1973 the more shocking news that on August 16 he had married—a distant relative, thirty-eight year old Emama Yohannan, whom he had met in 1968. The Patriarch's letter went on to defend the marriage of bishops. The community was stunned. Support for the Patriarch, wrote Mar Seraphim, "melted away overnight,"[67] A synod of bishops, meeting in Beirut in September, 1973, under Mar Khnanisho, decreed the Patriarch's deposition. The

[64] For the tumultuous welcome that Mar Shamun received by his people and the high hopes that his visit aroused, see Robert William De Kelaita, "On the Road to Nineveh: A Brief History of Assyrian Nationalism," *Journal of the Assyrian Academic Society*, 3, no. 1 (1994), pp. 26–27.

[65] *A Record of Trial Proceedings, From the Public Records of the Superior Court of the State of California in and for the County of Santa Clara, Concerning the Assassination of His Holiness, MAR ESAHI SHIMUN XXIII, Catholicos-Patriarch of the East*, p. 15. This is a 147-pages record of the almost 1800 pages of the court transcript. Left intact are the names of the participants and the substance of their testimonies; the final arguments of the prosecution and the defense attorney are printed in their entirety. (Published by the Mar Shimun Memorial Fund, Burlingame, California, 1976), hereafter cited as *Trial Proceedings*. The author is grateful to Mr. Leith Warda for sending him a copy of the court proceedings.

[66] See *Trial Proceedings*, pp. 36–37.

[67] *Loc. cit.*, p. 98. It can be argued that the Canon Law of the Church of the East does not forbid the marriage of bishops even though it was not the custom for the bishops of the Church to marry.

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Patriarch explained his position and the laws of the church, leading to a synodical meeting in Beirut in 1975, under the leadership of Mar Dinkha, the Bishop of Tehran. Once again it was agreed to accept Mar Shamun back as head of the Church; he accepted on condition that the final settlement of the question of the patriarchate and the celibacy of bishops be decided at a synod to be held in November 1975 in Seattle (later postponed till January 1976). On the 6th day of that November the Patriarch was assassinated.

Assassination of the Patriach

Mar Eshai Shamun XXIII was assassinated at his home in San Jose, California, bringing to an end a hereditary succession that saw the office of the patriarch pass from an uncle to his nephew, a custom adopted in the 16th century.[68] The assassin was a member of the Church of the East who lived in Canada, David Malek Ismail. His father, Malek Yacoub Ismail, was a friend of the Patriarch and one of his supporters in the past. David Ismail had arrived at Mar Shamun's house on November 6, 1975, at about 6:30 p.m. without any prior appointment and after heavy drinking. At the trial, held in March 1976, his testimony is recorded in these words: Mr. Ismail testified that he did not remember whether he rang the bell or knocked on the door. The door was opened by Mar Shimun, and Mr. Ismail knelt and kissed the Patriarch's hand. The Patriarch let Mr. Ismail into the house and they talked briefly about the Assyrians in Canada, Iraq, and Syria. During the conversation Mr. Ismail told the Patriarch: "Kessy,[69] don't come back again because most of the people, they don't like the Patriarch get married, and you are retired now . . ." Mr. Ismail stated that he was nervous and shaking for having spoken to the Patriarch in that way, and the Patriarch got very upset and asked him to leave. He stated also that the Patriarch had slapped and kicked him and spat in his face, and that he fell down. He testified that the Patriarch said some bad things about his father; that he had not planned to shoot the Patriarch, and had not been paid to do it. "I just got upset. I don't know what happened to me—what—I lost everything that I had."[70]

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[68] See above for details, pp. 55ff.
[69] The equivalent of "My Lord" in English.
[70] *Trial Proceedings*, pp. 47–49, 53.

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While David Ismail was with Mar Shamun, his wife Emama, six months pregnant, was upstairs bathing their infant son, readying him for bed. According to her testimony at the trial she heard her husband "scream her name twice, a shuffling noise, and three shots . . . she rushed down the stairs" and found her husband dead. "I saw three bullet holes close to his heart. . . . The front door was open." David Ismail was soon found in a nearby pizza parlour.

The Defense Attorney argued that what had taken place was an impulsive act, after the worst insult that could be given to the father of the assassin, a man who had been "a very staunch supporter" of the Patriarch. A psychiatrist and a clinical psychologist who had examined Ismail agreed that testing showed "an organic impairment, a brain dysfunction that would have him more likely to lose emotional control than a normal person . . . His emotional intensity . . . when out of control, could lead to violence or death."[71]

The Prosecutor argued that this was a premeditated act of murder: When the Patriarch opened the door, he saw David Ismail there, gun drawn and everything. And what is your first reaction? . . . you step back . . . And what is his first thought? "My God! Emama! My child!" And he screams "Emama! Emama! Ismail fires: fires once, he fires twice, he fires three times . . . The Patriarch falls . . ." The District Attorney further argued that one of the motives in the killing was Assyrian nationalism; he tried to prove that the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA) was involved in the assassination. During her testimony, Emama Mar Shamun, who knew David Ismail and his family when she lived in Canada, recalled that she had heard Ismail say that "once the churches were destroyed, the attention of the people could be given to politics and regaining their land." Emama testified that she also knew David Ismail's brother, Zaia Ismail, who "was politically involved with the Assyrian Universal Alliance."[72] The State of California, finding other evidence of premeditation adequate, did not pursue the political motive argument. The jury convicted David Ismail of first-degree murder, and sentenced him to imprisonment; he was set free twelve years later.[73]

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[71] *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 57.

[72] *Ibid.*, pp. A–B, 11–12.

[73] Fred S. Kelaita, a brother-in-law of the Patriarch, testified that the AUA wanted the Patriarch "to be both a spiritual leader and a political leader of the Assyrian people, but the Patriarch believed that the church should not be involved in political activities . . . the Patriarch had not supported the AUA because the AUA did

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New Patriarch Elected

The assassination of Mar Shamun brought with it the end of hereditary succession. Mar Khnanya Dinkha, the Bishop of Tehran, a man who had distinguished himself in the affairs of the church and community, emerged as the most likely candidate for ecclesiastical leadership. He had been appointed pastor of the "Assyrian Church of the East" in the Iranian capital in 1958; four years later Mar Shamun consecrated him as Bishop of Tehran. During a visit to Britain in 1967, a Lambeth official had described the Bishop as "the most hopeful ray of light which has appeared in the Assyrian church for many years."[74]

Almost a year after the assassination of Mar Shamun, Mar Dinkha convened a synod of bishops that met in England from October 12 to 17, 1976, at St. Paul's Abbey, Alton, Hampshire. In addition to Mar Dinkha, the synod included Mar Aprim Khamis of Chicago, Mar Narsai de Baz of Beirut, Mar Yohannan Abraham of Syria, Mar Timotheus Eyob of Trichur, two Italian bishops who had been consecrated by Mar Shamun in 1975, and representatives of Mar Khnanisho of Iraq. Present also were two bishops of the Church of England representing the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London respectively.

The synod elected Mar Dinkha as the 120th Catholicos-Patriarch of the Church of the East; he was consecrated on October 17, 1976 as Mar Dinkha IV, in the West London Church of St. Barnabas, Ealing, where a number of Assyrians had lived and worshipped. In his enthronement sermon Mar Dinkha spoke of the continuation of the policy of accommodation that had been recently followed before him. In a conciliatory speech he noted that the authorities in the Middle Eastern countries "have a good relationship with us. The sons of the Church live in liberty, peace and equality in all these countries with all their citizens."

Because of the Iran-Iraq war, then just beginning, the new patriarch reluctantly established his residence in Chicago, once again the head of the Church being far removed from his official see in Baghdad.[75] The early years of the new patriarchate were devoted to

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not have the support from the Assyrian people in the Middle East." *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 68. See also Coakley, *Bulletin*, p. 195.

[74] Cited by Coakley, *Bulletin*, p. 196.

[75] According to the *Assyrian Observer*, no. 4 (Autumn 1979), cited by Mar Seraphim,

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the disordered condition of the church from within. The bishops of the Church have met in synod almost regularly once every six years, sometimes sooner, to consider liturgical and other church reforms. The schism that Mar Darmo started has been the subject of continued talks throughout the past twenty-some years but has yet to be healed. According to Mar Seraphim, Iraq remains divided between Mar Dinkha and Mar Addai, the majority of the faithful there supporting the former. Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Australia and America are also largely with the new Patriarch. In India, the majority adhere to Mar Addai.[76]

Sensitive to the isolation of their Church from other sister churches, Mar Dinkha and his bishops paid serious attention to the ecumenical ties of their Church, both within the Middle East and beyond. We shall now turn our attention to the achievements made to date under the stewardship of the new patriarchate in its search for dialogue and unity with other churches, mainly the Roman Catholic Church.[77]

"Consultations" Between the Church of the East and the Roman Catholic Church

In 1984, Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV paid an official visit to the Vatican; at that time he shared with Pope John Paul II the ardent wish that one day their two Churches would be able to express together their "common faith in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary." As Pope John Paul recalled those words ten years later, he added that "Historians and theologians immediately set about examining very carefully the Christological consequences of the Council of Ephesus."[78] Those deliberations led to the historic

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the Iraqi government had allocated 3,000 square meters of land in Karradat Mariam, a suburb of Baghdad, for the building of a new patriarchate. *Op. cit.*, p. 100. Since taking office, Mar Dinkha's return to Iraq "has been repeatedly considered (and postponed)." Coakley, *Bulletin*, pp. 196–197.

[76] *Loc. cit.*

[77] The Church of the East became a member of the World Council of Churches soon after it was organized, but it had not joined—or was not invited to join—the Middle East Council of Churches until 1998, when it was finally admitted as a full member.

[78] *The Messenger, The Official Publication of the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East*, Number 11 (March 31, 1995), p. 12. For a discussion of the fifth-century's Council of Ephesus, see above, pp. 40–41.

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"Consultations" that took place in 1994; early that year, a delegation from the Pro Oriente Foundation—an ecumenical institution of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vienna dedicated to promoting mutual understanding between Christians of the East and the Christians of the West—visited the Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, in Tehran.[79] The Foundation invited representatives from the Assyrian Church of the East to participate in a series of ecumenical meetings aimed at discussing the general status of those Eastern Churches whose roots are in the "Syriac tradition." The consultations took place in Vienna on June 24–29, 1994, the participants representing all the churches whose liturgy still is in Syriac. Attending the conference were delegations from Assyrian Church of the East, Chaldean Catholic Church, Malabar Catholic Church, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, Syrian Orthodox of the autocephalous Church of India, Syrian Catholic Church, and the Maronite Catholic Church. The delegation of the Assyrian Church was headed by the Archbishop of the Assyrian Archdiocese of Lebanon, Mar Narsai de Baz.

The topics under discussion were on a variety of issues, ranging from the Christology of the Church of the East to dogma, liturgy, history, and pastoral relations. More importantly, for the first time in more than 1500 years, the participants who gathered in Vienna were discussing and exploring issues that related to the causes of separation of the Church of the East from the rest of the Christian churches. In his opening speech, Mar Narsai expressed the hope that the conferees would be able "to appreciate one another in a new way that will encourage us to resolve all that has kept us apart for these long centuries." He noted that his delegation would present papers on topics proposed by Pro Oriente; in their addresses, they would suggest (1) that the Church of the East is an apostolic Church that has maintained her faith in accordance with the sacred scriptures and the holy tradition of the one catholic and apostolic Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, and (2) they would emphasize that "the Assyrian Church of the East, is not a 'Nestorian' Church. Though Nestorius, the patriarch of Constantinople, is honored and venerated

[79] Among the significant contributions of the Foundation since 1971 have been major "consultations" that were held between theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. These dialogues have resulted in a number of statements of agreement between the heads of these Churches.

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in her thought and liturgical action, the Church of the East was established in Mesopotamia during the apostolic age centuries before the birth of Nestorius."

The Vienna deliberations led to agreements that were reached and formalized at the Vatican. By November 11, 1994, a Common Christological Declaration between the Roman Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, given at Saint Peter's Cathedral, opened with these words: "His Holiness John Paul II, Bishop of Rome and Pope of the Catholic Church, and His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, give thanks to God who has prompted them to this new brotherly meeting." The two patriarchs considered their agreement "as a basic step on the way towards the full communion to be restored between their Churches." The christological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries—cause of so much violence and bloodshed—were, in the words of the Common Christological Declaration, "due in large part to misunderstandings."[80]

The Declaration emphasized that the two Churches were "heirs and guardians of the faith received from the Apostles as formulated by our common Fathers in the Nicene Creed"; that they both "confess one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten of the Father from all eternity who, in the fullness of time, came down from heaven and became man for our salvation." The Declaration affirmed the formulations of the 4th and 5th centuries: that Jesus Christ "is true God and true man, perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity . . . His divinity and his humanity are united in one person, without confusion or change, without division or separation." Referring to the different interpretations of the two Churches, the Common Christological Declaration explained those variations in these words: "The humanity to which the Blessed Virgin Mary gave birth always was that of the Son of God himself." The Assyrian Church of the East refers to the Virgin Mary as "the Mother of Christ our God and Savior." In the light of this same faith the "Catholic tradition addresses the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God and also as the Mother of Christ. We both recognize the legitimacy and rightness of these expressions of the same faith and we

[80] For a discussion of these early controversies, see above, pp. 40ff.

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both respect the preference of each Church in her liturgical life and piety."[81]

The concluding paragraph of the Common Christological Declaration noted that full communion between the two churches was prevented by "obstacles of the past." To overcome those obstacles and be able to attain a unity that is "expressed visibly," the Declaration established a Mixed Committee for theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. The two churches could, in Pope John Paul's words, "from now on, proclaim together before the world their common faith in the mystery of the Incarnation."

In his remarks addressed to Pope John Paul II prior to the signing of the Common Christological Declaration, Mar Dinkha said that as the two Churches "move toward a more complete unity," the Declaration "will promote a new atmosphere of harmony and understanding between our distinct churches . . . Through greater mutual understanding of our distinct theological and liturgical traditions, and appreciation for our differences, accompanied with an untiring effort toward renewal, our two churches can proclaim the Gospel with a voice more alive and vibrant than would otherwise be possible. . . ."[82]

Chaldean and Assyrian Churches Dialogue

The basic theological agreement between the Roman Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East discussed above, cleared the way for the Chaldean and Assyrian Churches to initiate a process of dialogue and collaboration. Their goal was to restore the unity that was disrupted in the sixteenth century.[83] The heads of the two churches, Mar Raphael I Bidawid and Mar Dinkha IV, officially inaugurated the process when they met, with their respective delegations, in Southfield, Michigan, on November 29, 1996. In a Joint Patriarchal Statement, they called upon their churches to recognize in each other "as living today in our Churches, the same apostolic succession, sacramentality and Christian witness."

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[81] For the full text of the Declaration, see *The Messenger*, pp. 7–10.
[82] *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.
[83] For details on the 16th-century schism, see above, pp. 55ff.

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The joint statement also acknowledged the existence of differences between their churches that were formed during the period of separation. Both churches intended to keep some of those differences, such as the preservation of their own ecclesial identity as expressed in their liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary patrimony, as well as the maintenance of their freedom and self-governance, *and of their "Mesopotamian-Aramaic culture"* (emphasis added). In the case of the Chaldean Catholic Church, the preservation of its "full communion with the Roman See" had to be a basic principle that would be "continuously maintained throughout the process of dialogue and in any achieved model of unity"; that the Church's spiritual and cultural patrimony would be *adapted "to existing regional and cultural conditions"* (emphasis added). These differences, very diplomatically pointed out, called for the two Synods to ratify "the need for further dialogue and more involved collaboration between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church, and, in due time and manner, between them jointly and the Roman See, in order to bring about unity between the Assyrian and the Chaldean Churches."[84] The joint declaration ended on a positive note, hoping that the "Church of the East, restored to its historic fullness in faithfulness to the Lord, shall be an instrument for spiritual renewal, social harmony and cultural renaissance among her faithful, prompting them, once again, to bring the Good News of the Gospel to the four corners of the world for the glory of God's name."

Other Pro Oriente Consultations

Another non-official consultation within the Syriac tradition took place at the University of St. Mary of the Lake, Mundelein, Illinois, from 8–11 July 1997, at the invitation of Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, and the late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, Catholic Archbishop of Chicago. The conference was to launch a dialogue between the Church of the East and

[84] The Mesopotamian-Aramaic culture that both churches claimed is apparently a compromise term for "Assyrian identity," a term that, from the Chaldean viewpoint, is loaded with political as well as historical baggage; hence the proviso above: that these ancient patrimonies would need adaptation to existing regional and cultural conditions.

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the Syrian Orthodox Church. Observers present came from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the USA, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, and the Faculty of Mundelein Seminary, along with expert scholars and the staff of Pro Oriente.

Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV took this occasion to announce that at its meeting in Chicago, June 23–July 1, 1997, the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East had made the decision to remove from their liturgical books the anathemata and all condemnations voiced against such figures as Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria and Patriarch Severus of Antioch. With Mar Dinkha thus leading the way toward reconciliation, the participants undertook to discuss in their working sessions the subject of Anathemas and how to lift them in relationship to the question of ecclesial communion and heresy. Two specific topics under discussion concerned two honored teachers of the Church of the East who were condemned for heresy: (1) "The Person and Teaching of Theodore of Mopsuestia", and (2) "The Person and Teaching of Nestorius of Constantinople, with a Special Reference to his Condemnation at the Council of Ephesus."

Relying on the accomplishments of the First and Second Syriac Consultations, wrote the participants, and after reviewing the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia in the light of the modern recovery of more of his works than were available to earlier generations, it was agreed that "it is time to re-evaluate the anathema imposed on Theodore's person and works at the second Council of Constantinople in 553 A.D., one hundred and twenty-five years after [his] death." Similarly, in regard to the person and works of Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople, the participants wished that "A distinction should be made between the person of Nestorius, his faith and his pastoral concern on the one hand, and the heresy called 'Nestorianism' on the other. Furthermore, we take notice of the fact that the Assyrian Church of the East had no part in the Christological controversies in which Nestorius was involved. Patriarch Nestorius is not the founder of the Church of the East, as is often assumed, nor one of its hierarchs, but he became one of their honored teachers."

Noting that the anathemata of the past were pronounced by synods and hierarchs in the context of the controversies that have divided their churches, the conferees dedicated themselves "to the search for

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appropriate ways to lift them especially from liturgical texts, as an act of love and mutual respect." They also proposed "that our several churches undertake to rewrite our histories of the Christological controversies that have separated us," agreeing not to use polemical language in their descriptions of persons, institutions, and doctrinal formulae of sister churches.[85]

* * *

When this book was first published in 1961, shortly before the Vatican Council II was convened, the author concluded his work with the following two sentences: "With its worldwide organization and political prestige, with its educational institutions and educated priests, the Catholic Church, already strong in the Middle East, continues to attract Orthodox Christians into its fold. Most probably it will entirely absorb the remnants of the Nestorian Church, which to its faithful few is known by its proud but once-befitting name 'The Old Church of the East.'"

The words of Pope John Paul II, which gracefully portray a more positive prospect for the future of ecumenism than what I had envisaged some forty years ago, make an appropriate conclusion now. To assure the hierarchy of the Church of the East that their Church would not lose its identity in the proposed union, the Pope emphasized at the signing ceremonies cited above, that it was "of supreme importance to understand, venerate, preserve and foster the rich heritage of each of our Churches, and that a diversity of customs and observances is in no way an obstacle to unity." Turning to more worldly concerns, the Pontiff added: "We do not forget the long night of suffering endured by your Eastern Syriac communities . . . Those who despite everything have remained in their countries in the Middle East—and who have had to face war and unjust deprivation of every kind—should know that the Holy See will employ

[85] In this atmosphere of ecumenism and reconciliation, Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV and the Syrian Orthodox metropolitans participating in the Consultation informed the members that Mar Dinkha and Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church, have confirmed by letter that they have agreed to appoint a bilateral commission "to explore ways to bring about a rapprochement between their churches." It is the position of the Syrian Orthodox that their church is not monophysite, an extreme version of the one nature doctrine; namely, that the divine nature of Christ subsumed his human nature. See above, pp. 40–41.

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the means at its disposal, particularly through its contacts with Governments and International Organizations, to lessen their sufferings and if possible make them cease . . . [A] Church so distinguished in its past for its heroism as regards fidelity to the faith cannot remain marginalized in the Christian world, and especially among the Churches of the Middle East. We hope to be able to help you break down any isolation that still exists."[86]

[86] *The Messenger, The Official Publication of the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East*, Number 11 (March 31, 1995), pp. 12–13. For details on the untenable political position of Middle Eastern Christians at the close of the twentieth century, see above, pp. 224–227.

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